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SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY G. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 581. FOR WEEK ENDING FEBRUARY 17TH, 1900. [ONE PENNY.

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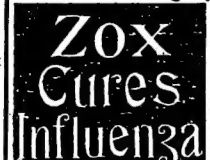

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A WOMAN'S LOVE.

HE watched her as she moved about among her guests, a gracious figure, full of dignity and ease; charming, whether she stood a moment idly playing with her great fan, letting her meditative eyes wander about the room, or moved from group to group with just the right word, the sympathetic glance, or ready smile for each. He had watched her hundreds of times before, finding her lovelier every time.

She wore a gown of black lace, and at her breast there was a little knot of Parma violets—a deep, fragrant cluster. Durant had walked four miles that afternoon, and had paid an absurdly exorbitant price for the satisfaction of seeing them there. Well, he had it. He even fancied he detected her in a half-stolen, fleeting caress. Certainly more than once she had bent her face tenderly to their fragrance while she stood apart.

Durant had drawn a little aside into the half-seclusion of the deep window, the better to watch her undisturbed. On the little table beside him lay her books, a dainty basket of confections, a glove, and other trifles. His hand stole wistfully from one to another, and he pleased himself with the fancied contact of her fingers.

"Looking at that Holbein?" said a gruff voice at his elbow. "You well may! Stupid subject, and a wretched light, but fine! Ah, we can't better that much. Those

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old masters! It's the fashion to turn up your noses nowadays, but the root of the matter was in them."

Durant turned with a start. He knew before he turned who his interlocutor was, the man who of all in his profession he most revered, the great artist Hood.

There had been years when Durant would have esteemed it glorious good fortune to exchange a word with the master. To-night, so absorbed was he in his own feverish fancies and desires that he almost resented the interruption.

"The Holbein?" he said. "Oh, yes! I've seen it before. Very fine indeed, I believe," mechanically.

The old painter cast a curious glance from under his shaggy brows at the young man.

"And you," said he abruptly, "what have *you* been doing? We saw the 'Sappho'"—alluding to a picture which had made a sensation at the Melbourne Exhibition, and had carried its unknown young painter into an enviable popularity and recognition at a bound—"we saw the 'Sappho,' what comes after?"

Durant's brow grew slightly ruffled.

"A—not much, as yet," he reluctantly confessed. He added rather forcedly: "I have some things begun. I have not been in a working mood lately. By and by——"

He was uncomfortably conscious of the piercing glance of those far-seeing eyes, and drew himself up a trifle stiffly in resentment.

"I hope so," said Hood. "Success, young man, should be a spur, not a curb," as he moved away.

It was not unkindly said, but it stung Durant unreasonably. He watched moodily the fine, erect figure of the old man, for whom everyone made way, and then his gaze turned again with a passionate determination to the woman he loved.

Guests were making their adieux, and she stood giving her hand to one and then another with a courteous grace.

"Going?" said a voice behind her, "and what of the Holbein? Great, of course. Ah, when will our young artists do work like that?"

"Never," answered the voice of Hood, bitterly; "never—as things are! They waste their youth; they have no conscience for their art. I despair!"

"You are in a blue mood to-night," was the laughing response. "But the Holbein—the Holbein——"

"I know nothing of your Holbein," answered the master gruffly.

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"But you went to see it?" persisted the other.

"And saw instead what spoiled my temper. Look there, Anthony. You see that young man dreaming beneath the Holbein?"

"Whom? Durant?"

"Yes, Durant—the painter of the 'Sappho,' a picture full of faults, I grant you, but a masterpiece. What colour! What feeling! A picture on which to build the structure of a noble fame. That man has promise—genius!"

"H'm! ah!—no doubt you are right. Everyone speaks of him. But what has he done of late?"

"Done!" answered the old artist angrily; "he has done nothing—absolutely nothing—since the 'Sappho!' What is worse, he never will do anything."

"But, my dear sir," expostulatingly.

The two men turned to meet the composed smile of their young hostess.

"Sir," interrupted Hood severely, "I have spoken to him. He has neither ambition, hope, nor strength. I spoke three words to him, and measured him. Clever he may be—it is a clever age—nothing more. His future is already past. He has committed the fatal sin for the artist—he has set something, no matter what, between him and his art. Clever he may be, will be, doubtless—great never."

There was a little, sharp, clicking sound behind him.

"Oh, my dear Miss Heatherton, your lovely fan!" exclaimed a regretful voice. "How did you do it?"

The two men turned to meet the composed smile of their young hostess, who held in her hand the shattered sticks of her great fan.

"It was absurdly fragile," she said serenely, laying it aside, and holding out her hand to the artist. "You are leaving us already?"

"Alas! yes," Hood replied, bowing with old-world courtesy. "Late hours and old age are ill friends. Make my adieux to your uncle, and tell him he has a treasure in his Holbein."

She let her hand lie in his a moment. He thought she looked a little weary. "Good-night," she said, "and—thank you!"

They were all gone at last; yet the young hostess stood before the fire in the outer room alone and absorbed in thought. Mechanically she bent her head above the violets, which lay drooping in her bosom, and, as if this action had decided her, she lifted her head and moved towards the inner room.

As the heavy *portière* fell behind her, Durant's longing, eager eyes met hers, and, without a word, he drew her silently into his arms and held her so, against his heart, a long, silent moment.

"Darling!" broke like a sob from his lips; and still she forbade him nothing, but let him hold her, clasp her, kiss her as he would; only her lips and eyelids trembled.

"Sweetheart," he murmured, exultingly, between his kisses, "you do love me—you do"

A sigh that was almost a sob answered him. With a sudden movement she freed herself and, turning from him, threw herself into a chair.

"Now," thought Durant, "what is it?"

After a moment's perplexity he went behind her and put his hands on either side of her head with a gentle touch

"I will kiss away her mood," he thought, smiling; and bending above her he upturned slowly to his own a face of ice and marble.

"Esmond," she said; and there was an expression in her eyes which made his hands fall silently, "Esmond, why did you not tell me of Herdsman's offer?"

A little wave of vexation crossed the young man's face, and he coloured, but answered carelessly:

"I dare say I should have—but why should I, after all? It was of no moment."

She gave him a swift glance, and then made a little gesture of invitation with her hand.

"Come and sit down. I want to talk with you."

He took a cushion, tossed it at her feet, and threw himself thereon.

She looked at him uneasily.

"Had you not better sit on the sofa or in a chair?"

He shook his head and possessed himself of her hand. "I prefer this."

"Very well. You will guess, Esmond, that I want to talk about you and your work."

She paused.

"Well," he said indifferently, seemingly more absorbed in the hand upon whose every finger he was pressing kisses.

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Again she looked at him—a look of uncontrollable distress, which he did not see.

"We have spoken of it," she said gently, after the fleeting glance, "a thousand times, all the winter long, without result; but now there is a reason why we should decide at once, and, Esmond—we—must!"

He lifted up his head and looked at her.

Under that gaze she grew very white.

"You mean——"

"I mean that if you are ever to do anything, ever to fulfil your promise, you must go to Europe to study, live, work among artists and all that your art needs—and you will never find a second opportunity like this."

"Like what?"

"Like this which Mr. Herdsman offers you. To go with him, under the prestige of his name—it is to have the *entrée* at once of the art circles of all Europe; to go under the best conditions, in the pleasantest companionship, and at a time when you most need it. Is it true he sails on Friday?"

"Yes," answered Durant coldly.

"So much the better. It will be easier to go quickly, and you—you should be at work. You waste your strength here. There is every—every reason why you should go. Esmond, you ought, you must!"

She put her free hand on his entreatingly.

He shook it off.

"For Heaven's sake, Marguerite," he said, "speak plainly. Don't torture us both unnecessarily. I don't know what iron resolve to make us both miserable you have taken now, but I tell you frankly I have borne all I can. You know what I have endured already, and—I am flesh and blood! You say you want me to go abroad; well and good. Do you mean you want me to go without you? After all that has passed—all these months of waiting and suspense—is that your meaning?"

"Yes," she said, "I mean it. Wait; let me finish now. We have argued, and discussed, and waited until we have no longer any judgment left, and we are both—both nervous and worn out. You have been in a perfect fever for months past. It is of no use; the thing must end."

"You forget to say," he put in bitterly, "what has been the cause—the sole cause—of all these wretched months—this fever! If you would have simply consented to marry me, Marguerite——"

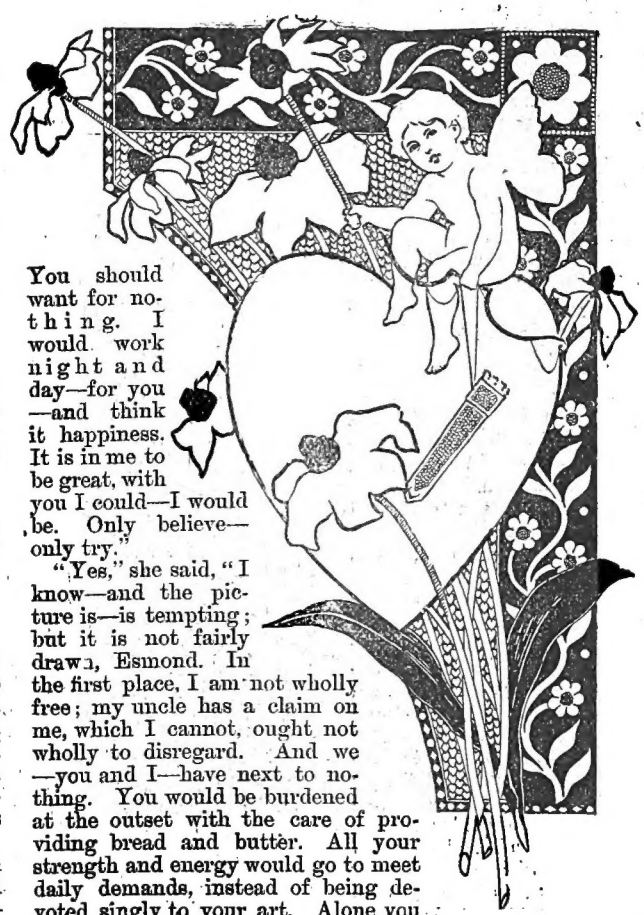
He broke off with a sudden passionate change, throwing himself upon his knees beside her.

"Consent now—only say you will marry me and we will start for Europe next week! I will show you. Work!—you shall see what I can do with your love to stimulate me. You say I waste my time—that I have done nothing all the winter. I know it, I know it; but I can do nothing while I live under this killing tension! I am like a man half-mad, benumbed, under a spell. With you—I would live. I have power—I know it; power and genius. With you, how I would work! And as for happiness—oh! darling, darling, let us make an end of all this torture. You do love me—only say you will go with me, bravely, nobly!"

His voice shook. He trembled like a leaf.

"Impossible!" The faint, chilling word fell from her lips. He simply would not heed it.

"It is not impossible! It is easy, wise, sensible!" he declared. "We are free; we love each other; that alone would make all easy. We have little money—what of it? We could live on almost nothing in Paris for a little, while I painted and made myself famous.



You should want for nothing. I would work night and day—for you—and think it happiness. It is in me to be great, with you I could—I would be. Only believe—only try."

"Yes," she said, "I know—and the picture is—is tempting; but it is not fairly drawn, Esmond. In the first place, I am not wholly free; my uncle has a claim on me, which I cannot, ought not wholly to disregard. And we—you and I—have next to nothing. You would be burdened at the outset with the care of providing bread and butter. All your strength and energy would go to meet daily demands, instead of being devoted singly to your art. Alone you can face privations, and never feel them, which would be a galling weight and chain if I were there. Esmond, I will never marry a man on these terms."

"Will you tell me," he said, checking himself, bitterly, "precisely what you would like to have me do?"

"Yes," she said, "I will tell you—and you will hate me for it! I would have you go away, to study, to work, for months, a year, two years, until you have laid the foundations of a name and fortune; and because I know your temperament and—and weakness I wish you to go utterly free, bound by no tie, even a tacit one. I wish to be to you a friend—the best of friends—a help, not a hindrance. I should like"—she gave him a swift look—"I should like you to write to me often, constantly, freely, of all your work, plans, hopes—provided," she added, with slow, distinct emphasis, "they are the letters of a friend to a friend. There must be no love-letters; nothing but unrest and wretchedness will come of your keeping yourself in a fever that way. I would rather give up all, not hear from you. You think me very hard, but what do I ask? Only that you should give your service first where it is first due. Yes, no woman's love on earth should supersede your art. And for the rest,"—she smiled a little sadly—"a knight of old thought it no hardship to serve his lady with years of waiting and knightly deeds. I don't think he reproached her for expecting him to prove his title to her favour. It is so utterly unreasonable for us to demand something more than a man's unsupported assurance that he loves us?"

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"Oh, you are fortified in reasons. You have all the wisdom on your side," he said bitterly. "I have only love on mine. So then," he said, "this is what it comes to. As I stand you will have none of me. Laying fame and riches at your feet, you may—relent!"

"If you choose to put it so—yes."

"I see; 'unto him that hath shall be given; from him who hath not, even——'".

He caught his breath sharply.

"So this is woman's love?"

"Yes," she answered, "this is woman's love."

"I have read," he said bitterly, "of women who lived otherwise; of women whose delight it was to go step by step beside the men they loved. There have been those who have given themselves freely to serve a man's genius; who have been his critics, helpers, models even."

"Yes," she said, "I have heard of such women. History does not record their end."

"At all events they loved—and lived—and were not ashamed nor afraid of it, unlike the women upon whom men waste their hearts and souls to-day. Pshaw! of what use to talk? We speak a very different language. There is one thing, though." He came nearer and looked down at her with an icy bitterness. "Has it ever occurred to you," he said, speaking with a cutting coldness—how close akin to fire—"has it ever entered your head, Marguerite, that, when your beautiful, desirable end is reached, and I am rich and famous, and you love me; it may be—too late? —that just possibly you may learn the value of the love you despise, when it is no longer yours?"

"You have all the wisdom on your side," he said bitterly. "I have only love on mine."

He hated himself before the words had passed his lips; he knew they were ignoble, unmanly, base, but he was half-insane with wounded pride and love.

She sat as if turned to ice.

After all it had not hurt her much he thought, after a quick, remorseful glance.

"Yes," she said at last, coldly, "I—I have thought of it. It is one of the reasons why I will have no shadow of a bond between us. You are absolutely free from this moment. I will take my chance."

"And you have dared to think—to make me think—you loved me!" he cried passionately. "Well, I know now at least; and you cannot be more anxious to have me gone now than I shall be to go."

He turned and strode to the door. His hand was on the *portière*.

"Esmond!"

He stopped, wavered, looked around.

Her yearning face was toward him, and her arms were outstretched.

Anger, bitterness, furious pride fell from him, and without a word he turned to her, knelt beside her, and with a low sob, laid his head upon her knees.

"My poor boy! my poor boy!" She caressed him as a mother does a child; and then, as she bent her lips to the curls of his bowed head, a single low word escaped them.

Durant lifted his head quickly; he caught her hands in his and fastened his eyes upon her with such a relentlessly probing gaze, that her own eyes were fain to fall beneath it.

"Oh," he said despairingly, "if I could understand you! Cold as you are, I do believe you love me better than you know. If you would but have the courage—if you would but let yourself go. Darling! sweetheart!"

He felt her tremble all over; felt her yielding, melting, changing, and he took a swift resolve.

"Don't speak," he cried, springing to his feet and holding both her hands. "Not another word to-night! We are both worn out. Don't even try to think. I will go, and you must rest. To-morrow, when we are both quieter, we will talk this over calmly, and decide. Don't tremble so! I will abide by your decision. I swear I will, even though it kills me—but not to-night. There," he added, tenderly; "say good night and I will go; you are so tired."

She pulled herself together. "Yes," she said, wearily, "that will be best. Good night."

She sat as he had left her, her head resting listlessly on her hand, her face half hidden. When at last she raised it it was full of conflicting purposes. Then she walked restlessly up and down the room. She stood beneath the Holbein, and the old painter's words rang cuttingly in her ears.

"He has committed the fatal first sin for an artist—he has set something between himself and his art. His future is already past."

And it was love of her—he had said so—which had snapped this vigorous promise. His love of her! An unutterable sadness filled her heart.

"A greater love would have risen by it," she said to herself—"a greater love, or——"

She stopped; even to herself she would not say,—"a greater nature."

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"Only clever, never great." The stinging phrases pursued her. "And yet," she thought to herself, with scorching self-contempt, "for all that, if he comes to-morrow——"

She turned away feverishly, desperately.

"What can I do?" she cried to herself. Then all at once she saw.

* * * * *

"I wonder if he has quite forgiven me," she thought. "It is three years now."

Three years before, Durant, hurrying through his bohemian breakfast at the studio, had been interrupted by a knock at the door. Opening it he found himself confronted by James, the Heatherton's servant, who, with a comprehending friendly grin, held out to Durant a small envelope. With a deadly misgiving Durant seized it, tore it open, and read:

My Dear Esmond,—You surprised me in a moment of weakness last night. Perhaps you might surprise me in another to-day so I have made it impossible. Hate me if you must; forgive me if you can. I have gone away for a little time, not to return until I hear that you have left for Europe with Herdsman or by yourself. Forgive me for withholding my address. A note to Uncle John will always reach me. It will be useless to try to shake my decision this time; even if you did so for a moment I should not abide by it.

Forgive me, Esmond—forgive me.

Faithfully and lovingly,
Marguerite Heatherton.

It was three years since Durant stood in his little studio, a broked-hearted man, in the bitterness of his spirit reviling his art, his fate, the day he first met and loved this fairest, most heartless woman.

And it was three years since he had sailed away with Herdsman for England, bearing with him all his little store of valued treasures, the Sappho, and the sorest heart, he told himself, that ever beat in any human breast.

He had left without any word in answer to her, had vowed he would never write to her again; but the many days and nights upon the calm, infinite seas exercised a potent influence upon his mood.

Day by day he stood by the steamer's side and watched the receding leagues of ocean grow between himself and Marguerite, and his longing, bitterly wounded heart yearned towards her. With every league it was less and less easy to picture her the heartless, cold, ambitious creature he was fain to think her. More and more, love, the infinite forgiver, made excuses for her.

When he reached England, as a matter of course he wrote, pouring out his whole soul in a torrent of tenderness, reproach, entreaty, unavailing regret.

And she replied at once, retracting nothing, conceding nothing; quietly reminding him of what she had said, that there were to be no love-letters, that they were but friends—best friends—all with such a loving gentleness as reduced Durant to despair.

Then he took refuge in proud silence, and for months he sent no word. But she wrote on, long friendly, intimate, most unimpassioned letters, ignoring utterly his silence, always full of his plans and work, her interest in his success, the latest art gossip—letters upon which he dwelt with an intensity he himself never realised. He never dreamed what a mighty part those constant messengers played in his life just then; from what abysses of despondency they kept him.

At last he too sat down and wrote a friendly letter, telling her of his work, his plans, of how agreeably he was surprised in England, how cordial he had found the English artists, etc.

"Not a word in it she can find fault with this time," he said to himself, with a last throb of bitterness, as he folded and sealed it.

Meanwhile he was, in spite of himself, becoming interested: in spite of himself becoming happier in his work. The constant stimulus of artistic surroundings, the society of other artists, the generous appreciation which his first exhibited work met with, the atmosphere of emulation and friendly recognition—all told upon his sensitive and receptive nature. He began to plan more largely and to attack his art more daringly.

His little studio became the centre of a coterie of brother artists, who watched with an enthusiastic and most unenvious delight the development of his genius. Durant throve like a flower in this genial environment, and began to do great things.

"Lilith has brought me quite a need of fortune," he wrote Marguerite. "She is the sensation of the hour, and has received the honour of a protective railing at the Royal Academy. I wish you could see her, for I am not ashamed of her; but I shall do better yet than 'Lilith.' Fortune follows but slowly. In fact I don't mind owning that I've had some pretty hard rubs to make both ends meet; but things begin to look brighter, too, in this regard. Another success like 'Lilith' and I am made."

"Lilith" and "Lilith's" praises overran the papers. Whole columns were given up to her; her name became a current word on the lips of fashionable and artistic Melbourne, proud of its claim to the young painter. Hood, the great artist, from whose age-enfeebled hand the brush was almost ready to fall, rejoiced in the prospect of a successor in whom the hope and glory of the Young World might centre.

"Glorious!" said he to Marguerite. "Have you heard what Durant is doing? There's a man who will uphold the honour of our young nation everywhere; who will be a glory to us all. And do you know," he added, as though conscience-stricken, "I decried him, foretold his failure! Here in these very rooms I said he would never amount to anything, that he lacked the elements of greatness. *I* said so!"

"Yes," said Marguerite; "I remember."

"At the same time," declared the master energetically, "it was true then. I never mistake. If he had gone on as he was, he would have failed as I foretold, for he had neither ambition nor energy. Something, something happened at the critical moment. Depend upon it, it was so. Well, whatever it was, it was heaven-sent. Art will be the richer for it."

He looked at Marguerite, and she at him; and all at once—who can tell how?—a great many things which had been puzzling the old man were made clear to him.

And Marguerite stood beneath the Holbein.

"I am so glad, so glad," she thought. "But he will do nobler work than 'Lilith' by and by."

And the friendly letters flew back and forth—long and confidential; but there was not, Marguerite remarked gratefully, even with a little hunger at her heart, there was not a word she could criticise in his. She did full honour to the self-control and the respect he showed to her wishes, at a cost which she had no difficulty in estimating.

In the spring her uncle died, and Marguerite was left alone.

"Come to me, my poor, dear child, *at once*," wrote her uncle's sister, from England. "My heart aches to think of you *alone*. You say John has amply provided for you;

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but what can a young, homeless, unchaperoned heiress do? My house and arms are open to you. Make up your mind to pack up at once and take the next steamer. I am all impatience to see you," etc.

"No," said Marguerite to herself; "I will not go until he asks me. I will wait a little."

Durant wrote at once, kindly, sympathizingly, on receipt of the news. He was still struggling along, already recognised as a rising genius, but hardly reaping the first golden fruits of his success.

"He is proud and ambitious," thought Marguerite. "Will he let my fortune keep us apart?" And the impulse came to go to him, to say: "You have done all I wished; you will be great. Let me help you a little now with my fortune. Let me come to you now." Then she thought again. "No; he is on the brink of fortune already. I exacted so much then. Let him taste the full delight now. Let him come to me as a prince, giving all, receiving only myself. He will be happier so. I must wait."

But month after month went, and it was three years in all, and she held his letter in her hand. It said so much—so much and so little. It told her of his great work, with which he hoped to seal his fame, to win his ultimate crown.

"I want you to see my Madonna," he wrote. "She is orthodox in nothing but name, I assure you. You remember all our talks on the subject. If you should see her you will see how much she owes to them—and you." Then he said: "If this brings me the fame I hope for, I shall come home in the spring for a little while." And under her hand lay the paper, telling in its latest, telegraphic despatches, of the triumphant success which had hailed the exhibition of the great Madonna, and covered with imperishable laurels the name of the young artist—Durant.

All Europe was ringing with it, and here stood the woman who loved him, trembling like a reed.

"He has waited for this," she said to herself. "Now he will come."

And then she took a brave resolve. She would not wait. Nobly had he won all she had to give, Well, she would give it nobly. She would go to him, bravely, purely, and, keeping back nothing of the passion of her heart, she would lay it at his feet, with a pride which never woman felt who stooped to lift a lover up.

* * * * * *

"My dear child, I can hardly believe it is really you! How like your dear mother you are—only you are taller and more imposing. And you are not tired? That is a special Providence: for, I almost feared to tell you, my dear, we are to have a little gathering here this evening—musical and artistic; very quiet, of course.

"I was afraid you would not feel like coming down, and that would have been a pity, for, my dear, I've such a surprise for you. Mr. Durant has haunted the house since I told him I had your telegram, and he was determined to meet you, only he was telegraphed for at noon—some royal command—and he had to go. He was quite frantic about it, but he will be here to-night, and he has sent a perfect garden of flowers. They are in your room. And what else do you suppose he has sent? My child, it is enough to turn my head with excitement just to think of having it under my roof, when all the dignitaries in London would give their eyes for it—the Madonna! He insisted upon having it brought here and hung just that you might see it at once. He said it was his welcome. And he superintended the hanging; would have it just so. He was welcome to do what he liked, you may be sure. I was only too grateful. I don't suppose there is another woman on earth short of her Majesty, he would have done it for."

"Ah! what flowers!"

She stopped.

The room was like a bower with roses—great masses of roses, red and gold and creamy white—set everywhere.

"Mr. Durant sent them," said her aunt. "These, he said, were to go on your dressing-table, for you were particularly fond of them,"

"These," were a great bowl of Parma violets, purple and dewy and fragrant, whose sweetness arose like incense to greet the girl.

"And now," said Aunt Emily, "that is all, I believe. Well dear, I will leave you to rest. Ring, if you want Hornells, and remember that you are really at home."

The door closed behind her.

And Marguerite, alone, knelt down and put her arms about the bowl of violets and bent her pale face lower and lower, till eyes and lips were hidden in the petals utterly.

"Can it be possible that is I?" she exclaimed to herself a few hours later when she stood before the glass. "Do I look like—that?" with a little ineffable thrill of joy.

She was so fair in all that soft black lace—so he liked best to see her. Last of all, with unsteady fingers, she took a handful of the violets and fastened them in her bosom. Then she looked at herself. Such happy eyes! Such a soft glow upon those cheeks! Such tell-tale, tremulous lips!

"And he called you cold," she said, to that glowing image. "He—he will not call you so now," and she hid her warm face in her hands.

"Yes; what is it?" with a start. "I will be down in a moment." "It has come," she thought.

Down the great stairs, across the lighted hall, she walked, as if in a dream. At the drawing room door of the long suite she hesitated, only a second, for, before she had time to think, her hands were seized in two strong, gentle ones, and she was drawn irresistibly across the threshold.

"Marguerite! dear Marguerite! Is it really you? I can scarcely believe it. Come into the light that I may see if you are yourself."

Esmond's voice, just the dear voice of old, only laughing now, and bright with excitement. She lifted

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her famished eyes. His face, the beautiful face, thinner a trifle, older, more manly, changed, "all for the better," she thought, in that one lightning, loving glance.

"And you," he went on gaily, "you are lovelier than ever. Were you always so tall? What it is to see you once more, Marguerite!"

Could tones be more affectionately tender, eyes more overflowingly delighted, clasp of hands more warm?

She lifted her eyes to his bravely.

"And I," she said, "I am glad to see you, Esmond."

"How good it is to hear your voice again!" he exclaimed. "You are not a bit changed, after all. To think," he ran on, with a sudden change of tone, "that I was not there to meet you! I made myself disagreeable in consequence, I can tell you, to all their highnightinesses. At least you got my flowers. How good of you to wear them!" he added, touching lightly the knot of violets. "For 'auld lang syne,' Marguerite; you were so fond of them in the old days."

She looked at him silently.

"I know," he continued, smiling, "I am not giving you a chance to speak; but if you knew! It is such a joy to see you. Ah!"—he turned to her with a sudden, eager start—"have they shown you my Madonna yet?"

"No," she said, "I—waited."

He gave her a quick, grateful glance.

"Thank you," he said. "It has been a dream of mine to show her to you. Let us go now, before the people come."

He led the way, talking all the while with so much buoyancy, so much life and freshness, throughout the entire suite of rooms to a small half-lit study at the end of all. And Marguerite followed. At the door of the little room Durant stopped. Opposite it hung a great frame with a heavy curtain drawn across it.

"Stay where you are," said Durant, over his shoulder. "It wants distance, and I want to see your face."

He went up to the great frame. He himself was a little pale, and Marguerite was white.

"Are you ready?" he asked, and he drew the curtain slowly away.

There she stood, the great Madonna, the majestic Madonna, like to no other Madonna the world has ever seen. No virgin, but a sublime mother, the type and image of the world's ideal—strong, and calm, and divinely human—and in her arms she held the hope and promise of the ages.

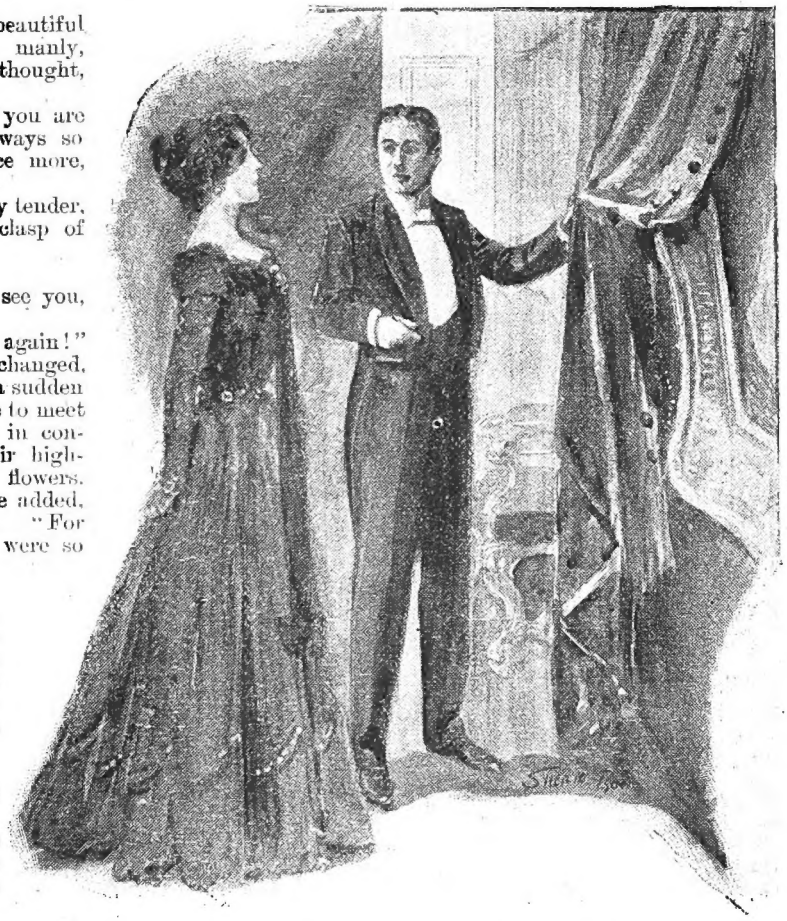
"You see," said Durant quietly, "I have made her simply—a woman."

He waited a moment silently, and then crossed the room, and stood looking down at Marguerite with a grave and gentle gaze.

"Are you content?" he said. "Does she satisfy your severe and noble standards?"

"Yes," said Marguerite, "I am content."

"Then," said Esmond, "one of the dreams of my life is fulfilled. But there is something more. Marguerite,



"Are you ready?" he asked, and he drew the curtain slowly away.

under this picture, of which you have been the largest inspiration, let me ask your forgiveness for all the suffering I have caused you. I was selfish, ill-controlled.

"I—I despise myself when I think of it. Believe me, I have lived to rejoice that you did not return that ignoble passion of mine, to value your sweet friendship, to bless you for your beautiful tenderness and patience, and, not least of all, to thank you for the bitter but most needed lesson. It has largely made me what I am, for I was resolved to prove that you had not done me justice. Admit," he said with a smile full of tenderness, "that I am not quite the worthless good-for-nothing you then thought me, and, dearest friend, sister, forgive me all, and love me a little."

There was a silence. Then she looked at him with a look he could not fathom.

"I have nothing to forgive, Esmond," she said quietly, "nothing."

He took her hand and kissed it.

"Will you give me one violet?" he asked, "just one, as a sign of friendship and perfect understanding?"

She took a violet from her bosom and held it out to him and smiled a little.

"Here," she said, "is the sign of friendship and perfect understanding."

She fixed her eyes upon him with a strange expression.

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"And now," she said, "is there nothing more? You—you are a very happy man, Esmond. You are young, rich, powerful; you have a divine gift. There is only one thing more a friend could wish you"

She watched him, how intently.

Durant's face glowed.

"Ah!" he said, "I saved that till last. I was about to tell you—and it is yet a profound secret."

"So!" she interrupted him. "I am rejoiced—beyond words."

"You are the first to know it," he said, with vibrating tones of happiness.

She unfastened the little knot of violets from her bosom, and laid it in the shadow underneath the picture.

"Thanks for that, too," she added, gently. "What is—her name, Esmond?"

He gave her name.

"She will be here to-night," he said. "She knows you already—knows all, Marguerite: but I want you to know her. May I bring her to you?"

"Yes," said Marguerite, "bring her to me."

"How am I ever to deserve so much good fortune," began Esmond, with grateful eyes.

There was a sharp ring at the bell.

"Let us go," said Marguerite, rising quickly. "Let us go. It may be she has come."

"Your niece is a very lovely woman," said one of the best judges in London to Mrs. Bretherton an hour later. "Surely I have seen her somewhere before—her face——"

"Not unless you have been to Melbourne," replied the hostess. "This is her first appearance here."

"Pardon me," said the same gentleman, later in the evening, to Marguerite, "but do you happen to know Durant the painter?"

Marguerite looked at him over her fan.

"Mr. Durant and I are old friends," she said.

"Ah, that explains it; you have a look of the Madonna. Pardon my remarking what all London will not fail to do," he added with a smile.

She bowed a little coldly.

"Any woman must feel honoured by the resemblance," she said. "Excuse me."

She passed on into the little room where the Madonna hung deserted.

* * * * *

"I thought I should find you here," said Esmond. "I have brought Olga."

Marguerite turned to the tiny, childlike, graceful figure at his side.

"A mistake, all a mistake," she said to herself. "She will not help him."

"And now," said Esmond happily, looking from one to the other, "you two are to love each other dearly. I know you will. And I am the proudest and happiest man on earth to stand beside you both—the two people dearest to me in the world."

Marguerite returned gently the look he gave her, so warmly, tenderly affectionate. She dropped her eyes *not* to see that other look he turned upon his betrothed.

When she raised them she found herself, with a shock of amazement, gazing straight into two glorious eyes, set in that childlike face. From their depths a strong and fearless soul looked out. "Thank God!" thought Marguerite, "all will be well with him."

Recalling herself she put out her hand.

"I was about," she said, "to commit the worst of solecisms. Mr. Durant is so old and dear a friend that I thought the woman he would marry I might dare to congratulate; but now," with a sweet fleeting smile, "I shall know that if she is fortunate, he has been more than fortunate."

The beautiful eyes contemplated her gravely.

"Thank you," said their owner, simply. Then turning to her lover, "Esmond," she said, with a certain dainty coolness, "there is a great, fat novelist in the other room—one of the greatest you ever saw, Esmond—and he wants to know me. Take me to him, if you please."

Durant laughingly gave her his arm, and Marguerite blessed their going. She did not dream that eyes as clear as her own had read her secret, and that a soul as noble had quietly taken as a trust into its keeping the honour and greatness of the man beside her.

She looked up, and the Madonna looked down at her with eyes of strength and lips of infinite compassion.

"And he will never know," thought Marguerite, with unutterable bitterness. "He will never know."

She unfastened the little knot of violets from her bosom and laid it in the shadow underneath the picture, and again lifted up her face exultingly, for love is strong.

And then—and then she let it fall again upon her hands, and the large, slow tears dropped one by one between the fingers, for hearts are weak.

Elsie Fitsham.

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HOW HE WON HER.

"It was in the year 1850," began the old Canadian, "that I came to Montreal and became employed in a hardware store in Wolfe Street. I became acquainted with a widow lady, who kept a few boarders in what was then known as Esmond Avenue.

"My landlady was accomplished and had evidently seen better days, but the death of her husband left her in reduced circumstances. She had two daughters, both lively, intelligent, and possessed of graces that only come from association with the better class of society. They were of extremely gay disposition, and I had not been at the house a month before I was hopelessly in love with Fanny, the elder of the two, and though at times her manner towards me was tender and encouraging, she carefully avoided giving me an opportunity to be alone with her long enough to declare my passion.

"The winter had nearly passed, without finding me any farther advanced in my suit, until one night in February, after a heavy fall of snow, I asked Fanny to take a sleigh ride with me, to which she consented, and after tea I procured as high stepping a pair of horses as could be found in the city, drove up to the house of my affinity, and in a few minutes we were whirling away out on the Sherbrooke turnpike.

"I had taken that road because it was less frequented at night than the other thoroughfares leading from the city, and we were not likely to be interrupted in our ride or conversation. The night was just cool enough to make it necessary to place my arm round my companion, the horses were frisky, and the moon shone with that peculiar light which is preferred by lovers to all others, unless it be that of a gas jet turned down so low that as an illuminator it is nearly useless.

"Through the outskirts of the town we whirled out into the country, where the lights from the farmhouses became more scattered, and the baying of a watchdog was the only sound heard. Fanny, who had previously sung, laughed and chatted merrily during our ride, now became quiet.

"As we came to a rise in the road that disclosed a level strip of two or three miles in length before us I said to myself, 'Before we turn I will settle my fate and go home a happier or more miserable man.'

"Hardly had I come to this conclusion before I heard a peculiar rushing sound behind us, and looking round could see a flock of sheep coming at full speed towards us. Behind them were two or three dogs, and these accounted for the fright of the sheep, which would doubtless run for miles before stopping and cause their owner much trouble in hunting them up. But a bright thought came to me.

"Fanny was a town-bred girl and had never seen a sheep save in the shape of cutlets or roast at her mother's table. I would engage in a strategy of the kind which is considered fair in love or war. Lowering my voice to a suitable tone, I said:

"'Fanny, my girl, are you brave—can you bear terrible news?'

"'Why, Henry, what is the matter—what makes you so pale?'

"Assuming a more tragic voice I replied:

"'Be firm, dearest—rely on me. We are followed by wolves! Look behind you and you can see the monsters, who are already thirsting for our blood!'

"She gave a hurried glance backward, heard the rushing sound of many feet, the deep breathing, which, when heard in the forests of the north, causes the wildest dismay, then drawing nearer to me said. 'I did not know there were any wolves so near the city, Henry.'

"'Neither did I think there were any,' I replied, 'but it seems we are mistaken, for these behind us are of the grey species and by far the most dangerous of any. They must have been driven here by hunger, and, unless our horses can reach the inn about four miles from here before we are overtaken, we are lost.'

"At this juncture the old curly horned leader, tired and out of wind from the long run, gave vent to a prolonged bleat which was fearful enough to scare a girl less timid than Fanny. I sawed on the horses' bits, and flourished my whip frantically round them until they were excited and apparently doing their best to escape the fate behind them, but I was secretly holding them back to allow the wolves (?) to get closer.

"On came the motley horde, panting for breath, nearer and nearer, until I began to throw out robes and blankets. 'These will keep them chewing a few minutes,' I said, 'and we may escape.' But the sheep had no appetite for the robes and were close behind us.

"I arose in the sleigh, gave the reins to Fanny, saying, 'Drive for your life—I will sacrifice myself for you!' and made a movement as if to jump out of the sleigh.

"'Never! Never!' she screamed. 'We will die together?' And she pulled me down beside her to await her fate.

"While thus employed I hurriedly declared my love and succeeded in obtaining a hasty avowal from Fanny; at the same time I was holding back the horses to let the pursuers go by. They came; the monsters separated and passed us on the other side, while I held my hat over her face that she might not see the dreadful deception I had played upon her.

"She fainted the moment we were overtaken by the wolves, and, without trying to revive her, I turned the horses homeward, and only stopped to pick up the robes which had been thrown out to check the ferocious animals. After driving a mile or two my now affianced wife revived sufficiently to hear how we were saved by a party of sleigh riders who met us just as we were surrounded.

"Though nervous and weak from the excitement, she recovered her buoyancy of spirits before we arrived home and had promised to keep our adventure a secret, as I informed her the owner of the horses would charge me a fearful price if he knew to what tests his steeds had been put. And that is my adventure with wolves and how I came to marry."

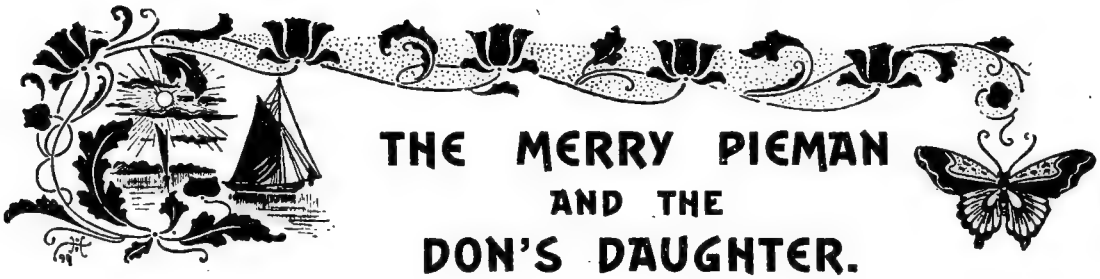
"But did your wife never find out the deception you practised?" we asked the old Canadian as he laughed again while thinking of his boyish prank.

"No until eight years ago," he replied, "when I told her one evening while she was ironing."

"What did she say?"

"Not much—not very much," answered our old romancer, but, removing his hat, he showed us a triangular space upon his head, such as might have been made by a hot polishing iron, and with not a hair upon its surface.

We thought Fanny was revenged. W. F. G.



THE MERRY PIEMAN AND THE DON'S DAUGHTER.

MANY years ago, upon the banks of a gleaming river that rippled through the dreary heart of Old Castile, there stood a castle with many towers, in which dwelt a haughty Don and his only daughter, Francella Dolores.

The Don had a nose like an eagle's beak and an eye like a red flash of fire in the dark, and he was very fierce and proud, for the blood of eleven generations of noble ancestors throbbed in his veins.

Francella was a sweet, shy girl, with eyes like those of the wild deer. She was graceful and fair as a wild flower in spring; and so wildly enamoured of her loveliness were all the youths and bachelors in that province that they one and all forsook their comfortable haciendas, gave up napping after dinner, and wandered about the country doing all sorts of ridiculous and daring things in the hope of winning her favour.

Francella, however, was wholly unmoved by all these wondrous doings, as she had for some time been deeply in love with a gay young pastry vendor whom she had seen selling pies in the market place one morning, clad in a bright blue and yellow jacket, and singing like a skylark all the while. His name was Pedro Perez, but every one called him the Merry Pieman.

To a maiden who loved as passionately as Francella, there was very little satisfaction in peeping through the lattice of her window at daybreak every morning, as she did, merely to see the object of her affection passing by with his basket of wares, and humming some merry tune. But the memory of even that little glimpse filled her dreams the whole day long, just as one sees green and scarlet circles, everywhere after looking at the sun.

One morning, however, as he passed with his basket full of tarts, whistling a scrap of a rollicking bolero, he chanced to look up and spied her peeping from the window.

The instant he saw her he stopped stock still and his whistle ran off to nowhere in a funny little squeak. The blood rushed to Francella's cheeks and she was about to draw the curtain, when he doffed his cap with a graceful bow, stooped swiftly as he did so, and, choosing the crispiest custard pastry in his basket, tossed it up towards the window.

"Oh, my!" she gasped. "Oh, my, it will spill!"

But the pastry sailed through the air like a swallow on the wing, turned over twice as it flew, and dropped on the window-sill unharmed with an appetising little flop that made Francella's heart go pit-a-pat. Speechless with delight, she clasped her slender hands and stood gazing in rapture at the fat little pats of currant jelly dotting the fluffy white meringue.

The young pastry vendor thought he had never looked upon a lovelier picture in all his life.

"Senorita Francella Dolores," he exclaimed, pressing his hand to his heart:

> "You're the cake of my endeavour and my jelly roll forever;
> You're my tapioca tartlet and my lemon custard pie;
> You're my candied fruit and spices and my juicy citron slices;
> You're the darling sugar-sprinkled apple dumpling of my eye!"

Francella's heart fluttered like a bird in a cage. "Truly," said she, as she set her small white teeth deep into the rim of the fragrant pastry with a fascinating crackle of the rich crust, "truly you are the most delightful lover I ever had. But tell me," she said tremulously, "is this pastry a vanilla-cream pastry or a lemon-custard? I can scarcely tell, I am so agitated—but if it is lemon custard you might toss me up two or three, for I just dote on lemon custard."

The words were hardly out of her mouth before a heavy foot-step, hurrying up the hollow stair, echoed down the long corridor. She turned deathly pale.

"Fly!" she cried, trembling from head to foot with apprehension; "it is my father. The smell of the pastry has betrayed us!"

For an instant she stood swaying like a pallid lily in the wind, as the crimson sash of the pastry vendor faded swiftly from the view, and she could not restrain a sob as she saw pies, and tarts fall here and there and break in fragments on the stones.

"Open the door, Francella," cried her father, in a terrible voice, beating upon the oaken panels with angry fists.

"Yes, father," faltered Francella, hastily finishing the pastry, though her hands shook with terror.

"Don't say 'yes,'" roared the furious Don. "But open the door instantly—I smell a smell of pastry!"

"A pieman passed a moment ago," stammered Francella.

"Girl," thundered the Don, "do not try to deceive me! I tell you I smell pastry, pastry; vulgar, hand-made lemon pastry, through the keyhole of the door!"

Francella, white with fear, pushed back the bolt, and her father strode into the room.

There on the window-ledge lay three flakes of pie-crust.

"Francella," cried her father, in a voice so icy cold that she shivered. "Francella, is it possible that you, a daughter of mine, have so far forgotten your rank as to eat pie, a common pie?"

Francella clung speechless to the curtain

"A daughter of mine should die before she would stoop to the pie of a low-born pastry vendor!"

"But, father," panted Francella, "I love him."

"What?" roared the Don. "A pie-seller?" and without another word he locked her up in the dungeon.

Then in a towering rage he sent out heralds through

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all the land, to proclaim in every courtyard, market-place and *plaza* that upon the following Monday he would hold a tournament at his castlé, open to all high-born *caballeros*, and t the victor in the strife would give his only daughte .e far-famed Francella Dolores, the Lily of Castile.

There had not been such another out-pouring of the chivalry of Spain since the days of the great crusade. From east, from west, from north and south they came. From the wild mountain passes of Castile, from the cross-road castles of Grenada and from the furthest limits of Navarre. Knights and squires, dukes, hidalgos, nobles and princes of the royal line, armour-clad with pennoned lances, fluttering plumes and splendid trappings, until the lanes and highways looked like one grand circus procession of sun-bright riders flaming in the glory of the midsummer sun.

And when the great day dawned the plain about the castle of the Don was hidden by a multitude of tents, marquees and pavilions of radiant colours, over which flapped and swung the banners of the best blood of Spain.

The trumpet blared from the Castle walls. Down clanged the drawbridge, and the haughty Don rode forth, his retinue about him, and at his right hand Francella Dolores, ashy pale, clad in white samite and cloth of gold and mounted upon a cream-white palfrey that her father had hired for the occasion of the best livery stable in Toledo.

A cheer of greeting rolled across the plain and thundered away in the canyons of the mountain, scaring the sheep nearly out of their skins; but Francella hung her head upon her breast like a wilted flower, unmindful of it all.

Up the glittering lists rode the Don to the bar of the high pavilion.

"Begin!" he cried, and waved his hand.

With a tremendous shout, the mail-clad warriors hurled together like mad wild boars.

Crash! went ashen spears, splintered in fragments that kept the poor in kindling-wood for a month.

Clang, clang, rang sword and battle-axe on helmet, mail and shield. Down went horse and rider in a cloud of blinding dust.

Round and round went the struggling, seething whirl, battling like tigers, while from the great pavilion rose shout and call to friend and foe:

"Go it, Gasper—now you've got him again!"

"Wade in, Carlos—hit him again!"

"Now, Diego—yah, yah, yah!" until the sky rang.

Many an unintentional somersault was turned in that wild onfall, and many a gallant knight was tumbled over his horse's crupper, like an apple from a tree.

But still the fight went on with unabated fury all day long, without an intermission for refreshments; though here and there at intervals, from under the mad medley of hilts and heels, some dishevelled *caballero* crawled on his hands and knees and telephoned for the ambulance.

But when at last the night fell, and over the mountains in the east the old moon hung like a tired cheese, the Don arose.

"Hold!" he cried. "The day is spent. Let us eat, drink and be merry, and sleep anon, and on the morrow the tourney may proceed."

Then followed a scene that baffles description.

The Don had mortgaged his whole estate to raise the ready cash, and "Get me the best cook in all Castile," he said.

"He shall be gotten," bowed the steward.

"And the richest stores in all the land!"

"They shall be procured."

And there upon the great tables spread in the long pavilion steamed and glowed a feast that filled the air for miles around with appetizing fragrance that was in itself almost a meal, and made the mouths of those noble warriors water like mountain springs.

Roasted capons, stuffed with spice and olives; flitches of beef, garnished with savoury and lined with currant jelly; broad gammons of sizzling bacon, crisped with onions and grated almonds; fat eels, stewed in rich, green oil; sausages buried in golden cheesecakes; roast lamb with clear mint sauce; venison collops with guava jam; turbot, herring, sturgeon, roe, turtle soup and devilled kidneys drowned in wine.

But in the night a woeful sound arose within the camp. There was busking and buckling in haste, and riding hard through the darkness, and wild blows and voices crying at the doors of all the doctors and apothecaries in the town.

And when the morning came the camp wore a melancholy, jaded air. Down hung the proud banners wearily, and slow flapped the tent doors dejectedly in the sullen wind, and there was a prevalent odour of peppermint and paregoric everywhere.

Again the trumpet blared from the castle wall, and the draw-bridge rattled down; and again the retinue of the Don and his daughter swept down the lists. But the lists were empty, and in the whole camp there was no sound, nor any person to be seen, save one doleful fellow with a plaster on his nose and a bit of raw beef clapped to a very dismal eye.

And while they wondered, there came from afar off a solitary horseman, riding down the mountain side. Spurring across the plain, he came up the lists in a cloud of dust and smote upon the shield of Don Santallana Lopez, Duke of Tors, with a blow that made the audience jump an inch off their seats.

"I challenge him to combat!" cried the stranger in a ringing voice, at the sound of which Francella started and clasped her hands.

Then the dust cleared away. There upon a fat little donkey sat a stout young fellow in a gabardine of blue and gold, wearing a white apron tied about his waist. In his hand he bore a broad, strong baker's paddle of ash, from which fluttered a banderole, and upon this banderole, on a blue ground, were blazoned a silver lily and three custard pies rampant. His face was hidden by a mask.

"Out with your Duke," cried he impatiently. "I can't wait here all day."

Then the Marshal ran to the Duke's pavilion, crying: "Señor, señor, they are calling thee in the lists!"

"Let 'em call, you noisy dog," bawled the Duke with his head in a bucket of ice-water. "I wouldn't fight, the way I feel, for a billion Lillies of Castile—my head is like to split!" and he groaned dismally. "Oh, that supper."

Then the stranger rode again down the lists and struck the shield of the Baron of Baquedena until it rang like a Chinese gong. But the Baron came not. And the Marshal ran to the Baron's tent and beat upon the sill-board, calling: "Señor, señor, they call thee in the lists!"

"Plague on the lists!" groaned the Baron, who was rubbing his forehead with spirits of camphor, and wore a mustard plaster where it would do the most good. "Plague on the lists and on you, too! My head spins

round like a flying Dutchman. I wouldn't fight for the fairest maiden in forty Spains!" And "Oh, that supper, that supper!" he groaned in bitterness of spirit.

Then the stranger smiled a strange, far-away smile, and smote upon the shield of all the knights within that camp, but not one came forth; for some were groaning and some were praying, while others were swearing dreadfully; and some threw their boots at the Marshal's head, and some tied themselves up in piteous knots and wailed for the doctor, and the burden of their wailings was: "That supper; oh, that supper."

At last they came to the Marquis of Seville; and he, being an old campaigner and a veteran glutton, had but an attack of dyspepsia that filled him with a yearning to fight a cage of wild cats for pastime. He summoned his two private blacksmiths, who got him into his fighting clothes; and then, with his ponderous lance in rest, he thundered down the lists, grinding his teeth until the shivers ran up and down his own back.

"Who art thou," he roared, hoarsely, "who darest me to joust!"

"Come and find out," replied the stranger, sweetly, as he took a good grip on his long ashen paddle.

The Marquis put spurs to his fiery steed and dashed upon the stranger like a thunderbolt.

Francella shrieked and hid her eyes.

But the stranger laughed, dug his heels into his donkey's ribs, dodged like a flash, ducked under the great beam of the Marquis's lance, and, swinging his paddle in the air till it whizzed again, he spanked the Marquis's fiery steed across the flank with such a vigour that the said fiery steed gave one tremendous plunge and such a wild kick of his hind legs in the air that the Marquis went heels over head in the dirt, where he lay with his head going round so fast that he did not know which direction was up.

Then the stranger rode around and poked him gently in the ribs and asked softly: "Fair sir, would you be pleased to have some more of this pleasing game?"

But the Marquis rolled over on his face and crawled away on his hands and knees as fast as he could, evidently labouring under the impression that there had been an earthquake and that the mountains in the vicinity were turning handsprings at his expense.

Then the stranger, turning to the great pavilion, cried: "Sir Don, if you have any other able-bodied victims to a delusion that they are the only people on earth, please bring them along!"

There was a dead silence.

"There don't seem to be any," said he, ironically.

"No," replied the Don, looking carefully over the programme and then about the camp in some chagrin, "there doesn't."

"Then," said the stranger, "it appears that I am the victor in this tournament, and the winner of the fair Francella Dolores."

"I don't know," said the Don, looking doubtfully at the donkey and the baker's paddle, "I have never seen anything like this laid down in the books of chivalric etiquette, and it doesn't seem quite, that is, not exactly —er—proper, you know."

"Nonsense," cried the stranger. "You know as well as I, Sir Don, that, 'All is fair in love and war.'"

"Yes," said the Don, dubiously, "but this isn't war."

"It is love though," cried the stranger, at which Francella giggled hysterically. "And you can see for yourself that love is given the first place in the proverb."

"Yes," rejoined the Don, reluctantly. "But before we begin talking of love or of giving you my daughter, who are you?"

"I," cried the stranger in a ringing voice, snatching off his mask as he spoke, "am—Pedro Perez!"

"What?" roared the Don, leaping to his feet, crimson with fury, and drawing his sword half out of its sheath. "A base-born pie seller?"

"Base-born?" cried Pedro, stoutly. "No, Sir Don—my family is as old as yours and my ancestry as good."

"What?" cried the Don—"what," being a favourite word of his—"do you dare to compare your lineage with mine?"

"Well, I should say I did!" replied Pedro, coolly. "I am a direct descendant of Adam and Eve. Does your family line run any further back than that or begin any higher?"

The Don's sword dropped back into its sheath with a clank. He bit his lips.

"No," said he, sourly, "I can't say that it does. But," he went on, sneeringly, "if you are well born, Sir Piepeddler, where are your estates?"

"I have none," answered Pedro, "but——"

"Nonsense! Be off, you beggar, you penniless fraud, or I'll——"

"Not so fast, Sir Don," cried Pedro, quietly. "I may have no estates of my own, but I am no beggar, nor am I penniless. I hold——"

"Hold? I don't care what you hold!"

"Don't be too sure of that, Sir Don," said Pedro once more, "for what I hold happens to be a mortgage upon your castle and your lands!"

The Don dropped into his chair as if some one had knocked his legs out from under him. "How—how"—he gasped, "how did you get it?"

"I was the cook who furnished your supper, last night—and the mortgage was my pay!"

The Don collapsed.

"And now, my dear Don," said Pedro, affably, cocking one leg across the pommel of his saddle and locking his hands about his knee, "if you prefer, you may keep your daughter, in spite of the fact that I love her and she loves me, and—I will foreclose the mortgage to-morrow morning."

"Oh, my dear fellow," cried the Don, changing expression like a kaleidoscope, "I was just joking, indeed I was. Francella is yours—take her, take her, my boy—and may you be happy!"

With a glad cry Pedro leaped from his donkey's back and sprang to Francella's side.

"Oh, my!" she gasped, ecstatically. "Oh, my! Now I can have all the lemon-custard pastry that I want!"

And as Pedro continued to hold the mortgage they lived happily forever after. C. Harvey.

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The Punched Kopeck.

"The annals of the Russian police, if they could be read, would excel the most extravagant imaginings of your detective story writers," said a handsome, heavily whiskered man, who was one of a party of five gentlemen in a small room in a St. Petersburg private palace. "We have excellent writers of fiction here in Russia,"—two of his auditors were Frenchmen—"and sometimes they go to the real for material, but I am sure that the shrewdest of them have never heard of the punched kopeck which belongs to the annals of the police just mentioned."

The man with the whiskers emptied his wine glass and pushed it away as he continued:

"About fifteen years ago, Count Yasilvitch was one of the best-known nobles of the Empire. His St. Petersburg establishment was conducted on a style of royal magnificence, and he had the imperial ear oftener than any other man of his rank.

"Well, one morning the count was found dead in his mansion, and in circumstances which went to prove that somebody helped him out of the world. As a matter of course, the Russian police took the affair in hand; and that was the last heard of it.

"At that time there was said to be attached to the Third Section a man named Paritz. Rumour invested him with all the attributes of the ideal 'sleuth.' Nobody could be found who had ever seen him, but, all the same, the great discoveries in crime continued to be placed to his credit. He worked out great results from impossible beginnings, and some said that it was Paritz who was adding most to the criminal population of Siberia. Of course everyone expected to see Count Yasilvitch's enemy dragged to light through the agency of this secret man-hound, but as months passed without anything of the kind transpiring Paritz became the laughing stock of St. Petersburg.

"Count Yasilvitch was known far and wide as a numismatist. His collection of coins was the most complete of any in the country, and had drawn from the mint large offers of purchase. In the collection were two ordinary copper kopecks which had been curiously punched through the centre. Count Yasilvitch valued these coins above any in his possession, and it was understood that they had a history which he would not reveal.

"When the police came to examine the count's coin collection after his death they discovered that a number of pieces were missing, and among them was one of the kopecks. Of course the authorities did not care to publish their discovery, and the world at large knew nothing about it. The coin which was not taken was given to the misty Paritz, with orders to find its mate and the count's enemy as well.

"Paritz took the case with his usual bow, and there the Chief of Police left it. The count's coins were put up for sale, and the numismatists who were drawn to St. Petersburg by the event wondered what had become of the punched kopecks. Time rolled on, and everybody forgot Paritz and his trail.

"I recollect that I took considerable interest in the trail of the kopeck at the time. I was rather intimate with a member of the police, and he told me much about the count's death and the hunt for his murderer. But question him as adroitly as I would, I could learn nothing of the identity of the renowned Paritz. Indeed, I was more than ever inclined to consider him a myth.

"I went abroad a few months after the Yasilvitch mystery was sprung on society, and travelled almost incessantly for ten years. I visited nearly every part of the globe, finding wherever I went secret representatives of our police, with whom, being a native Russian myself, I became as intimate as possible. I tried by these means to keep track of the mythical Paritz and his trail. The secret agents had heard about the missing kopeck, but they did not know how Paritz had progressed, nor where he was.

"About a year ago interest in the count's death was suddenly revived by the arrest of a man who had a lot of rare coins on his person. They were said to be some of those missing from the murdered man's collection, and they were subjected to the closest scrutiny. The fellow arrested was an honest and illiterate peasant, who averred that he had found the coins in the weed-grown garden attached to the late count's residence. He was not released till the garden had been dug over by the authorities, whose labours were rewarded by the finding of several rare roubles known to have been described in the Yasilvitch catalogue.

"Now, more than ever, Paritz and the punched kopeck became objects of derision. Several of the Russian newspapers received satirical communications on the subject, but, as a matter of course, they were not published. A Russian editor is supposed to know just how far to go to eat his bread this side of the frontier. For fifteen years the punched kopeck has been missing to the Russian police. The Yasilvitch case is as great a mystery now as it was then, and for once Paritz has been thoroughly baffled.

"If he is not a police fiction, he knows no more to-day of the whereabouts of the mutilated kopeck than does the gentleman who inhabits the moon. Our police stand baffled by one of the most insignificant coins of the world, for, until Paritz can place the kopeck in his possession alongside the one he has not, of course the mystery of Count Yasilvitch's death cannot be solved.

"Now, let me show how completely this Paritz has

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been beaten," and a smile stole over the whiskered face of the Russian.

"I am by no means a detective myself, but we pick up queer things in our everyday wanderings. Wherever I went during my tour, I examined every coin that fell into my hands, for I was quite familiar with Count Yasilvitch's collection, and believed that I should be able to recognise any parts of it at sight. I might even admit that I grew to be a hunter of the lost coins, and of the punched kopeck in particular.

"But I came home unsuccessful. One morning in the market of St. Petersburg I received in change a lot of small coin which, being in a hurry at the time, I carried home without an examination. In my library I fell to looking at the little pieces, and what was my astonishment when I found in my hand a punched kopeck?

"There was no doubt that I had the identical coin which had baffled the acumen of the Russian police for fifteen years and for which the wonderful Paritz could almost afford to risk his head. Yes; I had found in St. Petersburg the punched kopeck which the 'sleuth' of the Empire may have chased round the world, and in order to wind up my story with the proper climax, gentlemen, here it is!"

At the same time Colonel Simovar, who had just finished his narrative, drew from his waistcoat pocket a small coin, which he placed carefully and with the proper emphasis on the table under the lamp.

His auditors, two Frenchmen and two Russians, leaned forward with gaze riveted on the coin.

"Now, I would like to see Paritz match the punched kopeck and thus vindicate the fame of the Russian police," continued Colonel Simovar, looking up at his auditors in triumph. "If he does not I may hold him up as the laughing stock of the world and prove that the Third Section is not infallible!"

The last words had barely left Simovar's lips ere a very dark hand rose over the edge of the table, and the next second, to the utter consternation of four men, another kopeck, punched exactly like the first, lay on the cloth! Colonel Simovar fell back and stared first at the second kopeck and then at the guest who had placed it where it was.

"Paritz, gentlemen, has chased the kopeck round the world," said the guest, without the semblance of a smile on his swarthy face. "He takes great pleasure in vindicating the Russian police by matching Colonel Simovar's kopeck. I am Paritz!"

Colonel Simovar laughed derisively.

"You are my friend and guest, Captain Basilvitch," said he to the so-called Paritz. "I recollect that we met in Constantinople, and again in Milan and Athens. Come, gentlemen, Captain Basilvitch is a man of humour. We will drink to his little joke."

The face of Paritz did not relax.

Rising to his feet he drew forth a small diary, the leaves of which he turned with provoking coolness.

At length he began to read of Colonel Simovar's minutest doings in France and among the Pyrenees. From this he jumped to his travels in America, and was following him step by step back to the Tsar's dominions, when Simovar threw up his hands.

"It is enough," he said, "I surrender."

The police spy bowed to the other guests.

"I take the punched kopecks, gentlemen," said he, "and the murderer of Count Yasilvitch as well;" and gathering up the two coins with one hand he touched Simovar on the shoulder with the other.

There was no resistance on the Colonel's part, and he went with Paritz and the punched kopecks to the station.

Colonel Simovar paid the severest penalty of the law for his secret crime, and from the day of the finding of the punched kopeck the name of Paritz has been invested with a new dread and terror. F. H. T.

A POSTAL IRREGULARITY.

There was too much pepper in the soup, and too little salt in the potatoes; the joint was a trifle overdone, and the pastry not done enough; and Ada's expression implied that the cook was under notice. So the conversation was monosyllabic until the cloth was removed and I had started a cigar.

"It is well to be a man," said she, "to sit and smoke and enjoy yourself."

"There is no reason," I ventured to suggest, "why a woman should not sit, or smoke, or even enjoy herself."

"Unless she has a husband."

"My dear girl!"

"A husband who can never be trusted to recollect any little thing that he is asked to do, however important."

I tried vainly to blow smoke rings, and to think what I had forgotten.

"I can't remember—" I began, shaking my head.

"You can remember easily enough when you are going to play a stupid chess match; or to watch a brutal game like football."

"Or to send for half-a-dozen things that you have left out of your stores' order; or to ask Brown to tell his wife what you forgot to say; or to—er——"

"Post a letter."

I stopped my attempts at smoke rings abruptly.

"What letter?"

"A letter which I found to-day in your overcoat pocket. You needn't glare at me. I was merely looking for handkerchiefs for the wash. You generally have half-a-dozen in your pocket."

"Why?—What?—Er—when?"

"A letter to mother which I gave you last Tuesday." She produced it from behind the clock, and laid it firmly upon the table. There was no valid line of defence, so far as I could see.

"Umph," I remarked feebly. "I suppose it's too late to post it now?"

Ada looked at me in mute wrath.

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"It was awfully stupid of me," I admitted penitently. "I can't think how I forgot it. Was it important?"

"Important! It was to ask them to get me some woollen things for baby at Tapeandrape's sale; and to send them without fail by Friday. Now of course the sale is over, and I shall have to pay twice as much for them."

"Well, I must be fined the extra cost, that's all."

"It isn't all." She produced her handkerchief, and I trembled. "I've done something that I shall never forgive myself for!

"It's all your fault!" she commenced, wiping her eyes. "A whole week and you never remembered or said a word to me. I'll never trust you with anything again, so long as I live. No, no! Go away! I hate you; and I wish I'd never seen you! There!"

"Really, my dear, you're a little unreasonable."

"Unreasonable! When you've made me offend mother and the girls; and they're so sensitive, and they've always been so good to me—ever so much better than y-y-you."

The handkerchief was again in use.

"Why ever should they be offended just because they didn't get a letter asking them to buy things at Tapeandrape's sale? Come, come, Ada, don't be a little goose!"

"It isn't only that," she wailed. "I-I wrote them another letter this morning—before I found this."

"Whew!" I whistled. "Pitching into them?"

"Yes—if you must use such vulgar expressions."

"Did you—er—say much?"

"Oh, Fred, don't ask me!" She was so evidently distressed that I laid down my cigar and tried to console her.

"You can write and explain," I suggested, "or I will."

"But I wrote so disagreeably, I thought it was so unkind, when they knew the dear little baby wanted the things; and not to send a line even."

"You can tell them that you were feeling a bit upset."

"It wasn't a 'bit.' Cook was all behind again, when I came downstairs; and I thought your breakfast would be late, and you'd be as savage as a bear."

"But, my dear girl——"

"And grumble at me."

"But I don't!"

"Well, you look grumbling. You've no idea how cross you look, Fred."

"Ah! Well, about cook?"

"I gave her notice; and she was impudent; and then I sat down and wrote the letter."

I shook my head.

"That's where you were wrong, my dear. You should never write letters when you're in a state of irri——"

She cut me short with a stamp of her foot.

"It's very nice for you to talk in that superior tone," she cried, "when it's all your fault. You'll make my life miserable with your carelessness and forgetfulness, and never doing anything that I ask you. There was the birthday card for Aunt Mary Jane, that you left on the hall stand, and she didn't get it till the day after her birthday, and was so upset!"

"But she's all right since I explained."

"And there were the fowls that you forgot to order—I might have known you would! when the Stevensons were coming to supper; and I had to take cook off her work, and send her out for them—and she was so disagreeable over it, and you know how dear things are down here."

"Everyone forgets things sometimes," I protested.

"It isn't sometimes. It's always. Now I can't trust you with a letter without your forgetting to post it. I'll never forgive you so long as I live!"

I twirled my moustache uncomfortably. I do forget letters somehow, even my own. Then something came into my mind so suddenly that I burst into a fit of laughter.

Ada looked up at me with unspeakable things in her face.

"You're a perfect brute," she cried. Then she burst into tears. "You cannot c-care for me any longer, when you l-laugh and j-jeer at my distress! I'll go away—and take b-baby——"

"But it's all right, Dadie," I cried bending over her and—never mind what!—"Didn't you give me your furious letter this morning to post?"

"You know I did!"

"Well—er—the fact is, my dear—I forgot to post this one also!"

There was silence for a minute; after which I succeeded in pulling the handkerchief away from her face.

"It was rather clever of me," I inquired, "don't you think?"

"I think," said she, "that you ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

I suppose I ought.

Owen Oliver.

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A Christmas Auction

CHAPTER I.

Going——

It wanted a fortnight to Christmas Day, when Mr. Hartington arrived at Gresham, after a few days' visit to town. The air was cold and clear, and he walked on briskly for some minutes until he paused by a lamp-post to light his pipe. A flaming bill on the wall beside him attracted his attention; it was printed in the brightest colours. He read it once, and opened his eyes in amazement; he read it a second time and exclaimed: "Either I am dreaming, or the man has gone clean out of his senses!"

For the bill contained the extraordinary announcement that the entire household furniture of Francis Gower, Esq., would be sold on Christmas Eve, Tuesday December 24th, at eleven o'clock, to the first bidder, for the sum of one shilling.

"He is a lunatic, and must be put under restraint!" said Mr, Hartington, when he had read the words for the third time, for on the 25th of December, Christmas Day, he was to have officiated as best man to Mr. Gower on his marriage with Miss Ormside, the belle of Gresham. A handsome house had been taken and furnished at great expense, and now all the valuable possessions were to go for one shilling! It was altogether too pitiable to be ludicrous.

Mr. Hartington walked on at an incredible rate of speed, entirely forgetting his pipe, but he did not go fast enough to avoid seeing at every corner repetitions of the outrageous bill.

"With Sampson's name on it, too!" he ejaculated wrathfully. "I thought he was a high-class auctioneer, and would not have played into the hands of a madman!"

He gave a thundering rat-tat-rat at his door instead of using his latchkey. His housekeeper answered the door. Without greeting her he exclaimed, "Is Gower in a madhouse or going to one?"

Mrs. Thompson looked at him in surprise.

"Can't you answer, woman; is Gower in a madhouse I say? Be quick."

"If you wouldn't come in just like a whirl-wind, Mr. Hartington, I could collect my senses," replied Mrs. Thompson in an injured tone, "and instead of standing in the hall holding your bag in your hand, if you would come into the dining-room, where a hot chicken will be served immediately, I could tell you as much as lays in my power. I must say that Mr. Gower's most extraordinary proceeding is the talk of the town."

"Why did he do it?"

"I don't know, but it is said——"

"Oh, you don't know," interrupted Mr. Hartington, "Very good; I will find out," and he reopened the front door.

"But the dinner, the chicken!" exclaimed Mrs. Thompson.

"Bother the chicken!" replied Mr. Hartington from the doorstep, "I'm off."

"It seems to me that they are a pair!" said the housekeeper wrathfully, "and after all the trouble I have taken about his dinner to-night!"

Mr. Hartington walked on at the rate of about six miles an hour, and soon reached Mr. Gower's lodgings. Without inquiring if his friend were at home, he waved the servant on one side and entered, exclaiming, before the door was fairly shut:

"Are you mad, Gower? Are you stark, staring mad?"

Mr. Gower was sitting over the fire in an attitude of extreme dejection; he was a fine, handsome man of some three or four-and-thirty; but to-night he looked ill; his hair was ruffled, his general appearance betokened insensibility to either surroundings or circumstances. He raised his head and replied, with a half smile: "It looks as if I were mad, doesn't it? But I'm not."

"What's the meaning of it?"

"Ask Miss Ormside," said Mr. Gower, with a sudden frown and a tone of suppressed fury.

"*Miss* Ormside, and why not Edith Ormside to me, seeing that I have known you both all my life?"

"Look here, Hartington, you mean well but don't try to interfere in this business; I won't have it."

"But I will interfere, you consummate idiot," said Mr. Hartington, speaking very rapidly, his nervous, energetic face all aglow. "Unless you can explain your proceedings you ought to be locked up as a lunatic. I've

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a great mind to go this minute for a couple of doctors for you. Don't you know these confounded posters have made you the talk of the town?"

"I'll thank you to mind your own business. Yes, I do know I am the talk of the town. I swore I would have my revenge, and I'm having it, and she is the talk of the town as well as I."

"Upon my word you are a nice, manly fellow," said Mr. Hartington with contempt, "and if I didn't really and truly believe that you are off your head, I would never speak to you again. When were those precious bills posted?"

"To-day."

"Then I will have them all torn down, and tell everyone you did it for a bet."

"You will do nothing of the sort. I have sworn that that sale shall take place, and take place it shall, and I advise you to let me and my affairs alone, unless you want me to thrash you," said Frank Gower with a second burst of fury.

"You thrash me!" exclaimed Mr. Hartington in an equally furious tone, "I should like to see you do it. Come on and try."

But the other sat still with such an expression of hopeless misery on his countenance that Mr. Hartington relented.

"Well," he said, "I'm going. You've insulted me and behaved like a cad, but I'm not going to bear malice. Good-night, Frank."

"Good-night," replied Mr. Gower without moving. Mr. Hartington next made his way, still at the top of his speed, to the house of Mr. Ormside. He was told that Mr. and Mrs. Ormside were dining out, but Miss Edith was at home.

"I wish to see her," he said, and again announced himself.

He shook hands, exclaiming as he did so, "What is the meaning of it all?"

Miss Ormside's cheeks were flushed, her eyes shining. She was in the state of mind in which it is a relief to people to knock the furniture about, or throw something at someone's head, or stamp with rage. But, as she was a lady, she did none of these things, but only clenched her hands, and walked up and down the room.

"The meaning of it!" she repeated. "Ask Mr. Gower."

"He told me to ask you."

"The meaning of it," she said, her bosom heaving, "is that he is a wretch, and I wish I had never seen him. He has made our affairs known all over the town, and publicly insulted me by these bills. Everyone knew the 25th, Christmas Day, was to have been our wedding-day."

"What do Mr. and Mrs. Ormside say?"

"They were both very angry; my father with him, my mother with me. They have gone out to dinner to-night to try to stop the talk and make the best version possible, though I don't know what can be said."

"But what is it all about?"

"Mr. Hartington. I recommend you not to interfere in other people's affairs."

This second snub, coming as it did to a man who had had no dinner, was a little too much for Mr. Hartington.

"I apologise," he said gravely; "I will not intrude on you again. Good-night."

"Good-night," she replied, in equally cold tones; but before he had reached the door she called him back and said, her eyes flaming, "If you see Mr. Gower tell him I *hate* him."

CHAPTER II.

Going——

The world did not seem bright to Mr. Hartington the next day. His housekeeper was sulky because his dinner had been spoilt the day before; his two best friends were alienated from him because he had done his best in all conscientiousness to do them a service; the hateful posters stared him in the face at every turn, and, worse than all, every one of his acquaintances stopped him in the street to make comments on Mr. Gower's extraordinary conduct. Everyone asked him what it meant, and to every one this faithful friend gave the same answer—that the circumstances would be explained later on; for he was not without a hope that something would arise, some miracle perhaps take place, so that the marriage might still be performed, the sale averted. He made his way to Mr. Sampson, the auctioneer.

"I am surprised," he began, in his usual impetuous manner, "that you, Sampson, a high-class auctioneer, a fellow-townsman of Mr. Gower's for the last thirty years, should have lent your name to this disgraceful sale!"

"And why disgraceful?" asked Mr. Sampson, coolly.

"It is disgraceful. A house full of brand new furniture to go for a shilling. I'm ashamed of you, Sampson!"

The auctioneer knew Mr. Hartington well, and was not at all offended.

"And what was I to do?" he asked. "He would have

Before he had reached the door she called him back.

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this done, and done at an hour's notice. I said all I could to prevent it, but he declared if I wouldn't do it he would find some auctioneer who would, so I thought he would come off best in my hands."

"If you had any sense of decency you wouldn't have put those flaring colours on the posters to call everyone's attention. Auctioneers' notices are always printed in black."

"Come, come," said Mr. Sampson, in a rather offended tone, "I believe I have some sense of decency, the colours were by Mr. Gower's positive order."

"I beg your pardon, Sampson; you are a good fellow, I know, and I am sure you will do your best to stop this folly if stopped it can be."

"That I will, but I see no chance of it. I have heard no particulars, but, like every one else, I imagine there has been some deadly quarrel between him and Miss Ormside. I should be glad if anyone could patch it up. Why don't you try?"

"I have tried," returned Mr Hartington, "and my attempt has been a failure."

He left the town and took a long country walk, returning home after dark, still with a sense of depression hanging over him.

"I am in time for dinner to-day, Mrs. Thompson," he said, making an effort to rally.

"Yes, sir," replied the housekeeper, her good humour restored, "and you will find it to your liking. Miss Ormside has been here. She left a message that she would be glad if you could call round this evening. She looked as if she had been crying."

As soon as dinner was over, Mr. Hartington fulfilled the young lady's request, meditating as he went on the transitory nature of human happiness and how this Christmas Day, which was to have been a joyful one, would now be wretched to both his friends. Miss Ormside received him alone. She had lost her excitement and was looking as wretched as Mr. Gower had done.

"How good of you to come out this cold night," she said, taking Mr. Hartington's hand and leading him to an arm-chair beside the fire. "How cold you are. Do take off your great coat."

"My visit will not be a lengthy one."

"You are still offended with me. I asked you to come because I wanted to tell you how sorry I am I was rude to you last night, and you needn't be vexed with me, for I am so wretched and——"

Her utterance was impeded by tears.

"There, there, my dear," said Mr. Hartington, "you mustn't cry. Don't you know that you and I are always good friends, whatever you say to me? I was a little hurt and surprised that you showed no confidence in me, but that is all over now, and I daresay I was a meddling fool."

"But you're not, and I want to tell you everything. You are the kindest friend we have."

Mr. Hartington removed his great coat, and seated himself comfortably in front of the fire.

"Now for this woeful tale," he said.

"You know how fond Frank was of me and I of him, and we were to have been married so soon, and everything was ready—my trousseau, and that beautiful house, and the wedding presents, and the wedding cake."

"By the way, I brought you a bracelet from town. I am still in hopes I may give it."

"Thank you, but that is impossible. We have had a quarrel of such a nature that nothing can ever set it right."

"What about?"

"We went to a party and Major Cowper was very attentive, and I danced twice running with him and Frank was angry. And when he found fault I said I should dance with whoever I pleased and as many times as I pleased, and he said I shouldn't, but I was angry too, and so I danced six times running after that with Major Cowper, and then the party was over. And Frank came to me in the grounds looking white with rage, and he said I had no love for him, and called me a flirt, and I lost my temper and told him that I cared nothing about him and never had cared. But it wasn't true, Mr. Hartington, for I loved him with my whole heart, only my temper got the better of me."

"Frank came to me in the grounds and called me a flirt."

Mr. Hartington looked very grave and said nothing. Edith continued:

"And he said that if I had never cared for him, I was the falsest woman that ever lived, both in word and deed, and that he cared nothing about me, and that as I had held him up to public contempt by showing everyone that I preferred Major Cowper to him, he would show everyone that all was over between us, and that nothing would induce him to have anything more to do with me, although our banns had been read. And then these dreadful bills

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came out, showing everyone that he was thoroughly reckless, or all that lovely furniture would not go for a shilling. Oh, Mr. Hartington, can't you buy it?"

"Never mind the furniture. I must say I think you were greatly to blame, and he was a fool. But do I understand you to say that you love him still?"

"Yes, I never cared for anyone else, and I don't like Major Cowper one bit, and I don't know what came over me that night. But don't tell me you 'hope it will be a lesson' to me."

"I am sure I shall not do that."

"Thank you. If people only knew how very much more effectual a lesson is if applied by oneself than if pointed out by other people, I am sure they would not do it. Nothing enrages either children or grown-up people so much as having things 'pointed out' to them or so effectually destroys any good that might be done."

"I quite agree with you."

"Can anything be done about this wretched business?" asked Mr. Ormside in the hall, as Mr. Hartington was going away. "We wished you to see Edith alone, in the hope that you might set matters straight, but I must say I consider Gower's behaviour scandalous."

"And I Edith's," said Mrs. Ormside. "Anyone can see that he was beside himself with wounded pride and love when he had those placards out."

"I will do all I can," said Mr. Hartington, "but each of them has done all he and she can to wound one another. The difficulty of the case lies in the publicity that has been given to it."

The next day he called on Mr. Gower.

"Frank," he said earnestly, "put a stop to this farce, I beg. Have the bills of your sale removed, and make it up with Edith. I have been to see her, and I know positively that she loves you and always has done so. She is very unhappy."

"Let her be unhappy," returned Frank, moodily. "I am very unhappy also. I loved her with a great love, but I don't love her now. I *wouldn't*, unless she could prove to me as publicly that she loved me as she put me to shame publicly. But that she can't do, and I have done with her."

"She told me with tears in her eyes that she loved you. I will stake my life she spoke the truth."

"Then she told a lie before. I have done with her."

According to promise Mr. Hartington communicated the result of this interview to Edith. For a moment her spirit was roused.

"He seems to forget how publicly he has put me to shame," she said, but nevertheless Frank's words "unless she could prove to me publicly that she loved me," rang in her ears, and would not go from her.

Mr. Gower went to London, the days dragged slowly on.

"Can't you stop that sale, Sampson," said Mr. Hartington, "as Gower is away?"

"Can't!" replied the auctioneer, "my professional reputation is involved. I can't do it without directions from Mr. Gower."

* * * * *

Christmas Day was fast approaching; everyone, it seemed to Edith, was happy and joyous except herself. She spent her days in absolute seclusion, and the talk of Gresham increased as the day for the sale drew near. She saw no hope for herself, although she had put her pride on one side and resolved that she would take advantage of any opening that might present itself. Suddenly an idea occurred to her, which caused her cheeks to glow. She sent for Mr. Hartington in hot haste, and communicated her thoughts.

"But would you like to do such a thing as that?" he asked in amazement.

"No," she replied, "it would be dreadful to me to do it, but it is the only way. Frank is so terribly proud, and I can't think of anything else. You know he has sworn this sale shall take place."

Mr. Hartington departed, reflecting on the wonderful ways of women. Edith's scheme was most objectionable to him, and yet he, too, saw no other way open. To Mr. Sampson he went and held a conversation with him.

"I haven't the smallest right to do what you suggest," said the auctioneer, "but for old friendship's sake I will, though probably Gower will knock me down."

"Let him," said Mr. Hartington, "and I'll knock him down afterwards."

Mr. Sampson telegraphed to Mr. Gower that he entirely declined to perform the sale unless he himself were present in the house. Mr. Gower telegraphed in reply that he would be on the spot.

He had his arm round Edith and had taken her away.

CHAPTER III.

Gone.

Christmas Eve opened bright and clear. The air was frosty, but the sun shone. The church bells rang out at eight o'clock for early service and Edith attended, her heart dying within her as she thought of what she had set herself to do at eleven. The projected auction had given

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great annoyance to the Vicar of Gresham, who had remonstrated both with Mr. Gower and Mr. Sampson, to no effect.

"Surely the auction could have been held another day than Christmas Eve," said the Vicar. "It is a shocking example," for Gresham was a very High Church-town.

"I can't help it," said Mr. Sampson.

"But you could have helped it," retorted the Vicar, angry at the postponement of the wedding. A great number of families attended church at eleven, but shortly before that hour Mr. Gower's elegant house was filled with brokers, auctioneers, men, and all the young men of the neighbourhood, who had assembled in a body to see the fun. The furniture was not disturbed; as it was to be sold intact there was no occasion to touch it. said Mr. Sampson, whose rostrum was placed in the large dining-room. He himself looked anxious, and listened with disfavour to the jokes that were freely circulating about Mr. Gower and his affairs.

Meantime Mr. Hartington was with Mr. Gower.

"Tom," said the latter, "I have woke up to the fact that I have made a great ass of myself by this sale, but I can't stop it now."

"You can't," assented his friend.

"I was so madly in love with her that I was wild with rage when she provoked me, and I would have done anything. It's too late to help it now."

"It is too late," again assented his friend.

"I have sometimes thought since I have been in London that she must have cared for me. I wish she did now."

"Will this prove to you that she does?" asked Mr. Hartington, joyfully, and speaking a few further words very rapidly.

"It's impossible," said Mr. Gower.

"It's not impossible; it's true. Come along now and see."

"Come this moment," returned Frank, with excitement; "what are you delaying about? She can't do such a thing for love of me, after my conduct about the sale. Come, how slow you are; the sale will be over unless you make haste. Make haste," he said, rushing from the house.

"I don't think the sale will be over," said Mr. Hartington drily.

* * * * *

The sale was about to commence, groups of expectant brokers were standing about, prepared at any loss to assert their right to the first bid.

"Gentlemen," said Mr. Sampson, "you are all aware that this sale is one of an unusual character. You are all aware that for a houseful of new and elegant furniture to go for the sum of one shilling to the first bidder is a very extraordinary thing. But there is a condition attached to the sale, a most serious condition."

The faces of the brokers grew grave.

"That condition, gentlemen, renders it useless for any married man to make the bid."

The faces of the brokers fell, for they were all married men.

"Briefly, a young lady must accompany the furniture; he who buys it must wed her. Before I receive your bid, I will produce her."

He left the room. Breathless silence followed disturbed shortly by the hurried entrance of two gentlemen, who placed themselves at the further end of the room.

"It's a shame, makin' this condition and deceivin' us into comin' here Christmas Eve and all," said a portly broker.

"Silence!" shouted someone, as the door opened and Mr. Sampson appeared leading a very lovely girl dressed in white.

"Gentlemen," said Mr. Sampson, "this is the young lady."

All eyes were fixed on Edith Ormside, who stood still as a statue, her colour high, her head slightly bent.

Mr. Sampson mounted his rostrum.

"Now," he said, looking towards the end of the room, "who bids?"

"I do," shouted Frank Gower in a voice of thunder, before anyone else could speak, and before the scene had been well taken in by the audience he had his arm round Edith and had taken her away.

"The lesson has been a severe one, but it has been effectually learnt, Frank," she said.

* * * * *

Service was over at the Parish Church, and yet the congregation kept their seats, for a wedding party was coming up the aisle, consisting of Mr. and Mrs. Ormside, Edith, Mr. Hartington and Mr. Gower. The clergy returned to the chancel, and Christmas-time saw Frank and Edith man and wife. But to this hour the good people of Gresham are mystified. H. F. Curfett.

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SHORT STORIES ABOUT THE WAR.

We devote, every week, two pages of *Short Stories* to pithy, humourous anecdotes similar to those which appear in these columns. A prize of £1 1s. will be sent to the reader who submits the best storyette this week, and a copy of "The Knight of the Golden Chain," by R. D. Chetwode, to each of those whose attempts are used. The anecdotes may be either original or selected; in the latter case the source must be stated. The prize of One Guinea offered for the best Storyette in this competition has been won this week by Mr. H. E. Luck, 19 Cleveland Road, Chichester. Attempts for this week's prize should deal with WAR ANECDOTES and must reach the Storyette Editor, *Short Stories* Office, Henrietta Street, Strand, London, W.C., by Monday, February 19th. Post-cards only, please.

Not Quite the Same Thing.

"I'LL admit this much," said an English trooper to a Boer he had captured, "you fellows have got plenty of grit."

"Yes," said the Boer looking pleased, "we're pretty brave, aren't we?"

"Oh, you don't understand," said the soldier. "I'm referring to the grit in those German shells of yours; they're full of sand, you know, that's why they won't burst." H. E. L.

A Hint to the Weather Prophet.

HE entered the meteorological service office and said in his jerky way:

"This ere's where you give out weather predictions, ain't it?"

The clerk nodded.

"Well," continued the old man, "I thought as how I would come up and give you some tips."

"Yes," said the clerk politely.

"Yes. I've figured on it a little, an' I find that ye ain't always right."

"No, we sometimes make mistakes."

"Course you do. We all do sometimes. Now, I was thinkin' as how a line that used to be on the auction hand-bills down in our county might do fust-rate on your weather predictions and save you a lot of explainin'."

"What was the line?"

"Wind an' weather permittin'."

He went down without waiting to say good-bye.

D. R.

Rebuking "President Kruger."

ON a train pulling up for a short stop at our local station recently, a fringe-whiskered cleric began to overhaul the publications on an attendant newsboy's tray; but, after looking at all the war illustrations and deliberately enjoying a literary feast in *Short Stories*, he calmly declined to buy anything.

For a few moments the lad was speechless with disgust, then, with all the withering sarcasm at his command, and to the intense delight of a number of onlookers, he loudly remarked:

"Beggin' yur pardon, President Kruger, I thought everybody knew I wos sellin' these books an' papers, but it seems that you've taken me fer a bloomin' walkin' free library!" J. G.

Not Flattering to Tennyson.

DANTE ROSSETTI used to tell a story of Tennyson, with whom he was walking one sultry summer night through High Holborn. They passed a building brilliantly lighted up, and from which issued the sounds of joyous music.

"What is that place?" asked the bard.

"It is called," replied Rossetti, "the Holborn Casino."

"I should like to look in," pursued Tennyson, "only I should be at once surrounded by a crew of groundlings who would mob and pester and jostle me."

"My dear sir," quietly remarked Rossetti, "if you were to get on one of the tables, announce your name, and recite three of your poetic masterpieces into the bargain, probably not two per cent. of the audience would have the slightest idea who you were!"

N. T.

Pat the Jarvey.

I KNOW a remarkably pretty woman, who lives in the suburbs of Belfast.

One day she went into Belfast for a day's shopping.

Arriving at the first car stand, and having selected a tolerably clean vehicle, said to the driver that she "wanted to engage him for the day."

Poor Pat, never backward in paying homage to beauty, earnestly replied:

"Oh, ma'am, I only wish it was for life." M. M.

Sorry for the Sinners.

A LITTLE girl was graciously permitted one bright Sunday to go with her mamma to hear papa preach. It was a time of great rejoicing and responsibility, and the little face was all alight with happy anticipation.

Now, it chanced that on this special occasion papa's sermon was of the "warning" order, and his earnest voice rang out solemnly in the Sunday quiet. After a moment of breathless surprise and horror, the little listener's soul was wrought upon with a great pity for the poor mortals upon whom so much wrath was descending.

She rose excitedly to her feet, and her wide reproachful eyes just peeping over the back of the seat, called out in sweet, chiding tones:

"What for is you scolding all the people so, papa?"

F. B.

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Putting Tags on Dogs.

There was a certain master of foxhounds in one of the English shires who was greatly angered by the awkwardness of one of the gentlemen, who invariably rode over the hounds.

At one of the meets, the M.F.H. rode up to the awkward hunter, and, in the most chilling tones, remarked:

"Mr. So-and-So, there are two dogs in the pack to-day, Snap and Tatters, of whom I am especially fond, and I would esteem it a favour if you would avoid killing or maiming them with your horse's hoofs."

"Certainly, my dear fellow," replied Mr. So-and-So, "but as I do not know them, will you be kind enough to put tags on them for me?" C. J.

A Cheap Way of Getting Doctor's Advice.

A good story has just been told by a family doctor regarding a little ruse adopted by one of his patients who wished to save the expense of consulting him.

The patient was a woman of good means, but of frugal disposition. One day she began to feel some alarm regarding her health, and wishing to avoid a costly procedure, made an application to a life insurance company for a policy of large amount—so large, indeed, that they delegated three medical men to make an exhaustive examination of her before they could accept her as a risk.

In due time she was informed that her life had been accepted. She was thus in a position to assume that she was quite well, whereupon she replied to the company that she had changed her mind, and did not intend to take out a policy just then. A. B.

Quite Natural.

A story is told of an Oxford undergraduate who had been requested to entertain a party of London costermongers, and who had been advised by his friends working in the East-end to be "perfectly natural" in his conversation.

At breakfast he was very nervous, but at last managed to say:

"Ahem! aha! er-r-r-r-r. Many people in town just now?"

"Yus, gov'ner. About five million," was a coster's quick answer.

The host gave up trying to be "natural" after that. P. T.

A Choice of Three Things.

Australian judges make jokes that would hardly pass muster on this side of the equator. One of them recently going on circuit arrived at a town where a clean charge-sheet was presented for his acceptance, accompanied, of course, with the inevitable pair of white gloves. Having accepted the gift, he returned thanks in these terms:

"This proves that either the district possesses an unusually high standard of morality, or that there is nothing in it worth stealing, or that the police are not active enough to catch criminals."

Leaving his hearers in doubt as to which of the three alternatives he personally favoured, the judge smiled sweetly at the local head of the police force, and retired from the bench. W. S.

A TALE OF THE FIGHT FOR AFRICA.

BRITON OR BOER?

By GEORGE GRIFFITH.

WILL COMMENCE IN . . .

SHORT STORIES

. . . DATED FEBRUARY 24TH.

For Further Particulars see Next Week.

For years past Britain and the Transvaal have been spoiling for a fight, and it was left to that well-known author, Mr. George Griffith, to write a strong and exciting serial nearly four years ago graphically describing a huge war between the two countries.

Now that Briton and Boer are in deadly conflict it will be interesting to read the story, and see how far the imagination of the author has actually come true.

BRITON OR BOER?

deals with how the countries fought out their final fight for the possession of the richest region of the earth and one of the fairest portions of the British Empire.

The crack of the rifle and the scream of the shell will echo in the readers' ears from the rock-walls of the kopjes where the Boers lie hidden with their deadly rifles in wait for their foes.

The secret plottings of scheming politicians for the ruin of England will be laid bare and vividly contrasted with the deeds of heroism which confounded them. It will tell how Valour and Devotion grappled with Treason and Treachery, and how the murders of Bronkhorst Spuit were avenged and the shame of Majuba Hill wiped out.

Its chief characters will not be fictions of the imagination, but life-pictures of the very men who at that moment were on the one side plotting and scheming for the destruction of British power in Africa, and on the other fighting gallantly to uphold it.

It will show how those who were crying peace were in reality sharpening the sword in secret, and how that sword, drawn by stealth to stab in the dark, was blunted and broken in the inevitable day of battle.

Mr. George Griffith says: "In the romance of which the first chapters will be published in SHORT STORIES dated February 24th, I have attempted to answer in the form of an essay in prophetic fiction the question which forms the title of the story: 'Is the Briton or the Boer, the Englishman or the Dutch-Afrikander, going to rule South Africa?'"

Do not fail to order your

Short Stories

for next week at once.

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THE GHOST OF THE "PENGUIN."

FOR more than a week the *Penguin* had lain at anchor in the little harbour at Bastia. She was a small schooner, a weather-beaten lubberly craft with her yards splintered and one of her masts broken, yet she looked strangely picturesque, standing with bare poles against the flaming sky, as I allowed my little boat to drift before the gentle breeze.

Aboard the craft there were no signs of life visible, and I knew that Muggins must be ashore, filling himself with rum, as was his custom when Captain Darke was absent.

My old friend, the captain, had been beating about the Mediterranean with his lubberly schooner for half-a-score of years; and so he might still have been engaged but for the arrival of a letter at Bastia telling him of a newly-inherited fortune left him by an uncle who had been living in Florence.

But upon receipt of the good news he was off at once, leaving his disabled schooner in charge of Muggins, an old sailor who was more honest than sober.

As my boat drifted alongside the *Penguin* I perceived a rope trailing over the port side, and, making my little craft fast, I drew myself up on deck.

I looked about me, but no one was visible. It was evident that I was the only soul aboard the *Penguin*.

I threw myself on a camp-stool in the shadows of the sail, and fell to regarding the range of dark hills that rose at the back of the romantic little city. Presently I was interrupted by the sound of oars, and a few moments later Muggin's tawny head appeared over the rail. He started when he saw me, and was about to beat a hasty retreat, when my voice stopped him.

"Bless me, I thought you were a ghost, I did, by the powers!" he said, seeming well pleased that his fears had not been realised.

"Well, now, what the dickens is there about me, Muggins, to make you think me a ghost?" I asked.

"Oh, it isn't that you look like a ghost, Mr. Raymond," he returned apologetically. "But, you see, when a chap is looking to see a ghost, he's pretty certain to take the first live thing his eyes fall on for what he's looking for."

"Then you were expecting to see something of the supernatural kind?"

"That's a fact, Mr. Raymond, though 'tain't often a chap is believed when he tells such a story. There's a ghost on this old hulk, or else I'm losing my eyesight."

"And you really believe in such nonsense?"

"I believe what I sees that's all."

"What did you see?"

"Well, since you ask, I don't mind telling you. You see, since Captain Darke went away and the crew were discharged, the *Penguin* has been under my care, and I have been sleeping aboard this vessel and spending most of my time here. Last night, about two o'clock, I woke, thinking I heard something moving near me. I was sleeping in my cot on the deck, and as I looks about me I sees a woman, all in white, moving like a spectre right by the hatchway.

"While I was watching, it seemed to sink into the deck and disappear. I'm not the man to run from a single night-prowler, but I felt queer-like at this, and can't see how a woman could be on the *Penguin*. Thinking she might have gone down the companion-ladder, I goes down with a lantern but finds nothing. Then I looks over the ship, with the same result. I slept no more that night, and though I look after the ship, during the day, I shan't sleep here again if I know myself, call it ghost or what you will."

With this he picked up a lantern and descended to his boat that lay alongside.

"Then I shall spend the night here, and lay your ghost for you," I said.

"I'll thank you if you will," he returned, "though I'll be blowed if I think you'll do it. Good-night, Mr. Raymond. I'll drop alongside early in the morning and see how you have fared. There's the key of my cabin," he added, tossing the key upon deck. "You'll find pipes and plenty of 'bacco, and a sip of rum in a decanter, if you look close. Now again, good night to you."

His oars dipped in to the water, and he was gone.

Dusk was already settling over the water. I took a seat on the deck and lit a cigar, and began running over in my mind some of the events that had befallen me since my arrival in Corsica.

For more than three months I had been staying in the romantic little island, finding a restful charm in its quiet seclusion that was a pleasing contrast to the life I had been spending for the past two years in the gay capital of the restless and pleasure-loving French.

One is not likely to expect to meet with adventures of the thrilling kind in the peaceful precincts of Bastia, yet something bordering upon this had come to my lot less than a month before.

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For the amateur artist the quaint little city will furnish many subjects for the pencil and brush, and I had made good my opportunities since my arrival.

The most prized among my collection was the portrait of Veda, the little Corsican fruitseller. There was something fascinating in her very pose, and the dark beauty of her face had drawn me to her as if by some subtle witchery.

One evening, as I was strolling through the streets, I heard a cry of mortal terror come from the court of a ruined building where several poor families had taken their abode, and entering hastily, I perceived an aged woman, a withered hag, with uplifted knife, in the act of striking a girl who was crouched in the corner of the wall.

I struck the knife aside, and the would-be murderess fled, leaving me face to face with Veda, the intended victim.

She only paused a moment to press a kiss upon my hand, then she slipped through a gap in the wall and was gone. That was the last I had seen of her.

To my inquiries regarding her whereabouts I received no information, excepting a bit of her past history, which told me that she had belonged to a wealthy and influential family, and that she had received a finished education. But reverses had come. Her father had fallen a victim to a dreadful vendetta, and she had finally been left a penniless orphan.

I was deeply interested in her, but no one could give me the slightest clue as to whither she had fled.

Still I had lingered about the places where I used to see her. Was I in love with the little Corsican beauty?

Her face would come before my mental vision asleep or waking, bringing a sweet sensation I had never before experienced; and yet I tried to dismiss her from my thoughts.

I sat smoking for some hours upon the deck of the *Penguin*, watching the yellow lights dancing in the romantic little city, and drinking in the fresh, sweet air of the night that stole up from the Mediterranean.

It was about eleven o'clock when I stretched myself upon the cot which Muggins had placed upon the deck. I fell asleep soon after, and dreamed of Muggins' ghost.

It seemed that some strange presence came to me—a woman, beautiful beyond any dream; and just as I reached out to touch her she vanished, leaving only a faint odour of some strange sweet perfume. I awoke suddenly with that inexplicable sensation that sometimes tells us of the unseen presence of another.

I sat up and looked about me in vague bewilderment. The moon had risen out of the sea, and was flooding the deck with its mellow radiance.

As my mind grew more composed I detected a subtle perfume on the night air—the same that had come to me in my dream.

Was it only the effect of my imagination? No; there could be no mistake as to its reality. Something white lay at my feet. I picked it up. It was a delicate piece of lace-embroidered linen, and exhaled the breath of perfume that had before greeted my senses.

While I stood bewildered at the amazing circumstance I perceived a white form emerge from the hatchway and move forward with a slow, gliding movement.

I stood speechless, staring at the strange figure, the words of the superstitious Muggins coming with sudden force to my mind; and in spite of my utter disbelief in the sailor's absurd story, something like a feeling of awe came over me.

I stood immovable, watching the figure as it came towards me. As it drew near I perceived that it was a girl, and as the moonbeams fell on the pale face I recognised it as belonging to Veda Dorlos, the little fruitseller.

Her eyes were wide open, and staring vacantly ahead in a way peculiar to a somnambulist. She was a sleepwalker! The thought came to me like a flash. Yet what could account for her presence aboard the *Penguin?*

Without attempting to solve the puzzle, I started towards the figure; but, as I did so, the sound of something like the dropping of an oar in a boat came from over the port. Then a moment later the dark figure of a woman—the same I had seen making the assault on the little fruit seller—slipped noiselessly over the rail. She paused for but a moment to glance about the ship; then, with a cry of rage that might have proceeded from some wild animal in deadly combat, she leaped upon the unconscious girl, the blade of a long knife glinting in the light of the moon. Roused to action by the sight of the murderous intruder, I leaped quickly forward, and before the knife descended to do its deadly work, I caught the hand that held it

But if I reckoned on an easy victory in subduing my adversary, I soon discovered my mistake for the woman though aged to all appearances, seemed to possess the strength of the strongest man, and, finding herself foiled in her murderous attempt, she turned upon me with the fierceness of a panther. Coming unexpected as the attack did, it caught me off my guard, and before I realised my peril, the hand that held the knife was wrenched from my grasp; then there was a swift blow. I felt a keen pain in my shoulder as the blade entered, then a mist gathered before my eyes, and I sank unconscious upon the deck.

* * * * *

When my senses returned it was broad daylight, and I was lying on a cot in Muggin's cabin, the beautiful but troubled face of Veda bending over me.

It was a week before I was able to go ashore, and though I had a trained nurse from Bastia, Veda refused to leave me entirely in the hands of another.

Well, in that week I learned to love the little Corsican beauty with such an intense devotion that I could not bear the thought of a separation.

Her life had been one of trials and misfortunes. The old hag who had twice sought the life of Veda was prevented from taking my life by the timely arrival of Muggins, who had come over to the vessel in his boat just before daybreak to see how I was faring. Finding herself thwarted, she leaped into the bay, and was drowned before she could be rescued by Muggins.

She was the last of the Boralodo family, between whom and the Dorlos a dreadful vendetta had existed, and it was to escape the vengeance of the old woman that Veda had stowed herself aboard the *Penguin*, hoping to be carried to some foreign land and thus escape the violent death that constantly threatened her.

Veda and I were married, and a month later were enjoying our honeymoon on board the *Penguin* with my old friend Captain Darke, who had returned and had the vessel repaired.

Muggins was much elated over the happy ending of my attempt to "lay" his ghost, though he always declared I had made a most lucky failure, and instead of laying the ghost, I had myself been layed by it. H. T. H.

THE ANGEL OF THE REVOLUTION

By GEORGE GRIFFITH

CHAPTER LXVIII.

THE JUDGMENT OF NATAS.

THE myriad-voiced chorus of the Song of the Revolution ended in a mighty shout of jubilant hurrahs, in the midst of which the *Ariel* dropped lightly to the earth, and Tremayne, dressed now in the grey uniform of the Federation, with a small red rosette on the left breast of his tunic, descended from her deck to the ground with a drawn sword in his hand.

He was at once recognised by several of the leaders, and as the words "The Chief, the Chief," ran from lip to lip, those in the front ranks brought their rifles to the present, while the captains saluted with their swords. The British regulars and volunteers followed suit as if by instinct, and the chorus of cheers broke out again. Tremayne acknowledged the salute and raised his hand to command silence.

A hush at once fell upon the assembled multitude, and in the deep silence of anticipation which followed, he said in clear, ringing tones:

"Soldiers of the Federation and the Empire, that which I hope will be the last battle of the Western nations has been fought and won. The Anglo-Saxon race has rallied to the defence of its motherland, and in the blood of its invaders has wiped out the stain of conquest. It has met the conquerors of Europe in arms, and on the field of battle it has vindicated its right to the empire of the world.

"Henceforth the destinies of the human race are in its keeping, and it will worthily discharge the responsibility. It may yet be necessary for you to fight other battles with other races; but the victory that has attended you here will wait upon your arms elsewhere, and then the curse and the shame of war will be removed from the earth, let us hope for ever. European despotism has fought its last battle and lost, and those who have appealed to the sword shall be judged by the sword."

As he said this, he pointed with his weapon towards the Tsar and his staff, and continued, with an added sternness in his voice:

"In the Master's name, take those men prisoners! Their fate will be decided to-morrow. Forward a company of the First Division; your lives will answer for theirs!"

As the Chief ended his brief address to the victorious troops, ten men, armed with revolver and sword stepped forward, each followed by ten others armed with rifle and fixed bayonet, and immediately formed in a hollow square round the Tsar and his staff. This summary proceeding proved too much for the outraged dignity of the fallen Autocrat, and he stepped forward and cried out passionately:

"What is this? Is not my surrender enough? Have we not fought with civilised enemies that we are to be treated like felons in the hour of defeat?"

Tremayne raised his sword and cried sharply, "To the ready!" and instantly the prisoners were encircled by a hedge of levelled bayonets and rifle-barrels charged with death. Then he went on, in stern, commanding tones:

"Silence there! We do not recognise what you call the usages of civilised warfare. You are criminals against humanity, assassins by wholesale, and as such you shall be treated."

There was nothing for it but to submit to the indignity, and within a few minutes the Tsar and those who with him had essayed the enslavement of the world, were lodged in separate rooms in the building under a strong guard to await the fateful issue of the morrow.

The rest of the night was occupied in digging huge trenches for the burial of the almost innumerable dead, a task which, gigantic as it was, was made light by the work of hundreds of thousands of willing hands. Those of the invaders who had fallen in London itself were taken down the Thames on the ebb tide in fleets of lighters, towed by steamers, and were buried at sea. Happily it was midwinter, and the temperature remained some degrees below freezing point, and so the great City was saved from what in summer would infallibly have brought pestilence in the track of war.

At twelve o'clock on the following day the vast interior of St. Paul's Cathedral was thronged with the anxious spectators of the last scene in the tremendous tragedy which had commenced with the destruction of Kronstadt by the *Ariel* and which had culminated in the triumph of Anglo-Saxondom over the leagued despotism of Europe.

At a long table draped with red cloth, and placed under the dome in front of the chancel steps, sat Natas, with Tremayne and Natasha on his right hand, and Arnold and Alexis Mazanoff on his left. Radna, Anna Ornovsky, and the other members of the Inner Circle of the Terrorists, including the President, Nicholas Roburoff, who had been pardoned and restored to his office at the intercession of Natasha, occupied the other seats, and behind them stood a throng of leaders of the Federation forces.

Neither the King of England nor any of his Ministers or military officers were present, as they had no voice in the proceedings which were about to take place. It had been decided, at a consultation with them earlier in the day, that it would be better that they should be absent.

That which was to be done was unparalleled in the history of the world and outside the recognised laws of nations; and so their prejudices were respected, and they were spared what they might have looked upon as an outrage of international policy and the ancient but mistaken traditions of so-called civilised warfare.

In front of the table two double lines of Federation

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soldiers, with rifles and fixed bayonets, kept a broad clear passage down to the western doors of the Cathedral. The murmur of thousands of voices suddenly hushed as the Cathedral clock struck the first stroke of twelve. It was the knell of an empire and a despotism. At the last stroke Natas raised his hand and said:

"Bring up the prisoners!"

There was a quick rustling sound mingled with the clink of steel as the two grey lines stiffened up to attention. Twelve commanders of divisions marched with drawn swords down to the end of the nave, a few rapid orders were given, and then they returned heading two double files of Federation guards, between which, handcuffed like common felons, walked the once mighty Tsar and the ministers of his now departed tyranny.

The footsteps of the soldiers and their captives rang clearly upon the stones in the ominous breathless silence which greeted their appearance. The fallen autocrat and his servants walked with downcast heads like men in a dream, for to them it was a dream, this sudden and incomprehensible catastrophe which had overwhelmed them in the very hour of victory, and on the threshold of the conquest of the world.

Three days ago they had believed themselves conquerors, with the world at their feet, now they were being marched guarded and in shackles, to a tribunal which acknowledged no law but its own, and from whose decision there was no appeal. Truly it was a dream, such a dream of disaster and calamity as no earthly despot had ever dreamt before.

Four paces from the table they were halted, the Tsar in the centre facing his unknown judge, and his servants on either side of him. He recognised Natasha, Anna Ornovsky, Arnold, and Tremayne, but the recognition only added to his bewilderment.

He thought, in a dazed sort of fashion, of the ball at the British Embassy in St. Petersburg, and of the first trial of the war-balloon in the Gatschina Park, and of the breast-pin that he had given the young English engineer who had so strangely escaped the death prepared for him, and of the mysterious way in which the jewel had been returned to him.

In the supreme hour of his fate it was these comparative trifles that were uppermost in his mind. To the millions who had fallen in battle since then he gave no thought; their lives were but as counters in the mighty game that he had played and lost.

There was a slight flush on the face of Natas, and an angry gleam in his dark magnetic eyes as he watched his captives approach, but when he spoke his tones were calm and passionless, the tones of the conqueror and the judge, rather than of the deeply injured man and the personal enemy. As the prisoners were halted in front of the table and the rifle-butts of the guards rang sharply on the stone pavement, so deep a hush fell upon the vast throng in the Cathedral that men seemed to hold their breath rather than break it until the Master of the Terror began to speak.

"Alexander Romanoff, late Tsar of the Russians, and now prisoner of the executive of the Brotherhood of Freedom, otherwise known to you as the Terrorists—you have been brought here with your advisers and the ministers of your tyranny that your crimes may be recounted in the presence of this congregation, and to receive sentence of such punishment as it is possible for human justice to mete out to you——"

"I deny both your justice and your right to judge. It is you who are the criminals, conspirators, and enemies of Society. I am a crowned King and above all earthly laws——"

Before he could say any more two bayonets crossed in front of him with a sharp clash, and he was instantly thrust back into his place.

"Silence!" said Natas, in a tone of such stern command that even he instinctively obeyed. "As for our justice, let that be decided between you and me when we stand before a more awful tribunal than this. My right to judge even a crowned King who has no longer a crown, rests, as your own authority and that of all earthly rulers has ever done, upon the power to enforce my sentence, and I can and will enforce it upon you, you heir of a usurping murderess, whose throne was founded in blood and supported by the bayonets of her hired assassins. You have appealed to the arbitration of battle, and it was decided against you; you must therefore abide by its decision.

"You have waged a war of merciless conquest at the bidding of insatiable ambition. You have posed as the peace-keeper of Europe until the train of war was laid, as you and your allies thought, in secret, and then you let loose the forces of havoc upon your fellow-men without ruth or scruple. Your path of victory has been traced in blood and flames from one end of Europe to the other; you have sacrificed the lives of millions, and the happiness of millions more, to a dream of world-wide empire, which, if realised, would have been a universal despotism.

"The blood of the uncounted slain cries out from earth to heaven against you for vengeance. The days are past when those who made war upon their kind could claim the indulgence of their conquerors. You have been conquered by those who hold that the crime of aggressive war cannot be atoned for by the transfer of territory or the payment of money.

"If this were your only crime we would have blood for blood, and life for life, as far as yours could pay the penalty. But there is more than this to be laid to your charge, and the swift and easy punishment of death would be too light an atonement for Justice to accept.

"Since you ascended your throne you have been as the visible shape of God in the eyes of a hundred million subjects. Your hands have held the power of life and death, of freedom and slavery, of happiness and misery. How have you used it, you who have arrogated to yourself the attributes of a vicegerent of God on earth? As the power is so too is the responsibility, and it will not avail you now to shelter yourself from it behind the false traditions of diplomacy and statecraft.

"Your subjects have starved while you and yours have feasted. You have lavished millions in vain display upon your palaces while they have died in their hovels for lack of bread, and when men have asked you for freedom and justice you have given them the knout, the chain, and the prison.

"You have parted the wife from her husband——"

Here for the moment the voice of Natas trembled with irrepressible passion, which, before he could proceed, broke from his heaving breast in a deep sob that thrilled the vast assembly like an electric shock, and made men clench their hands and grit their teeth, and wrung an answering sob from the breast of many a woman who knew but too well the meaning of those simple yet terrible words. Then Natas recovered his outward composure and went on; but now there was an angrier gleam in his eyes, and a fiercer ring in his voice.

"You have parted the wife from her husband, the maid from her lover, the child from its parents. You have made desolate countless homes that once were happy, and broken hearts that had no thought of evil towards you—and you have done all this, and more, to maintain as vile a despotism as ever insulted the justice of men, or mocked at the mercy of God.

"In the inscrutable working of Eternal Justice it has come to pass that your sentence shall be uttered by the lips of one of your victims. For no offence known to the laws of earth or Heaven, my flesh has been galled by your chains and torn by your whips. I have toiled to win your ill-gotten wealth in your mines, and by the hands of your brutal servants the iron has entered into my soul. Yet I am but one of thousands whose undeserved agony cries out against you in this hour of judgment.

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"Can you give us back what you have taken from us—the years of life, and health, and happiness, our wives and our children, our lovers and our kindred? You have ravished, but you cannot restore. You have smitten, but you cannot heal. You have killed, but you cannot make alive again. If you had ten thousand lives they could not atone, though each were dragged out to the bitter end in the misery that you have meted out to others.

"But so far as you and yours can pay the debt it shall be paid to the uttermost farthing. Every pang that you have inflicted you shall endure. You shall drag your chains over Siberian snows, and when you faint by the wayside the lash shall revive you, as in the hands of your brutal Cossacks it has goaded on your fainting victims. You shall sweat in the mine, and shiver in the cell, and your wives and your children shall look upon your misery and be helpless to help you, even as have been the fond ones who have followed your victims to exile and death.

"They have seen your crimes without protest, and shared in your wantonness. They have toyed with gold and jewels which they knew were bought with the price of misery and death, and so it is just that they should see your suffering and share in your doom.

"To the mines for life! And when the last summons comes to you and me, may Eternal Justice judge between us, and in its equal scales weigh your crimes against your punishment. Begone! for you have looked your last on freedom. You are no longer men; you are outcasts from the pale of the brotherhood of the humanity you have outraged!

"Alexis Mazanoff, you will hold yourself responsible for the lives of the prisoners, and the execution of their sentence. You will see them in safe keeping for the present, and on the thirtieth day from now you will set out for Siberia."

The sentence of Natas, the most terrible one which human lips could have uttered under the circumstances, was received with a breathless silence of awe and horror. Then Mazanoff rose from his seat, drew his sword, and saluted.

As he passed round the end of the table the guards closed up round the prisoners, who were staring about them in stupefied bewilderment at the incredible horror of the fate which in a moment had hurled them from the highest pinnacle of earthly power and splendour down to the degradation and misery of the most wretched of their own Siberian convicts. No time was given for protest or appeal, for Mazanoff instantly gave the word "Forward!" and, surrounded by a hedge of bayonets, the doomed men were marched rapidly down between the two grey lines.

As they reached the bottom of the nave the great central doors swung open, and through them came a mighty roar of execration from the multitude outside as they appeared on the top of the Cathedral steps.

From St. Paul's Churchyard, down through Ludgate Hill and up the Old Bailey to the black, frowning walls of Newgate, they were led through triple lines of Federation soldiers amidst a storm of angry cries from the crowd on either side, cries which changed to a wild outburst of savage, pitiless exultation as the news of their dreadful sentence spread rapidly from lip to lip. They had shed blood like water, and had known no pity in the hour of their brief triumph, and so none was shown for them in the hour of their fall and retribution.

CHAPTER LXIX.

The Ordering of Europe.

The hour following the disappearance of the Tsar and his ministers from the cathedral was spent in a brief and simple service of thanksgiving for the victory which had wiped the stain of foreign invasion from the soil of Britain in the blood of the invader, and given the control of the destinies of the Western world finally into the hands of the dominant race of earth.

The service began with a brief but eloquent address from Natas, in which he pointed out the consequences of the victory and the tremendous responsibilities to the generations of men in the present and the future which it entailed upon the victors. He concluded with the following words:

"My own part in this world-revolution is played out. For more than twenty years I have lived solely for the attainment of one object, the removal of the blot of Russian tyranny upon European civilisation, and the necessary punishment of those who were guilty of the unspeakable crime of maintaining it at such a fearful expense of life and suffering.

"That object has now been accomplished; the soldiers of freedom have met their hirelings of despotism on the field of the world's Armageddon, and the God of Battles has decided between them. Our motives may have been mistaken by those who only saw the bare outward appearance without knowing their inward intention, and our ends have naturally been misjudged by those who fancied their accomplishment meant their own ruin.

"Yet, as the events have proved, and will yet prove in the ages to come, we have been but as intelligent instruments in the hand of that eternal wisdom and justice which, though it may seem to sleep for a season, and permit the evildoer to pursue his wickedness for a space, never closes the eye of watchfulness or sheaths the sword of judgment. The empire of the earth has been given into the hands of the Anglo-Saxon race, and therefore it is fitting that the supreme control of affair should rest in the hands of one of Anglo-Saxon blood and lineage.

"For that reason I now surrender the power which I have so far exercised as the Master of the Brotherhood of Freedom into the hands of Alan Tremayne, known in Britain as Earl of Alanmere and Baron Tremayne, and from this moment the Brotherhood of Freedom, more commonly known and spoken of as the Terrorists, ceases to exist, for its ends are attained, and the objects for which it was founded have been accomplished.

"With the confidence born of intimate knowledge, I give this power into his keeping, and those who have shared his counsels and executed his commands in the past, will in the future assist him as the Supreme Council, which will form the ultimate tribunal to which the disputes of nations will henceforth be submitted, instead of to the barbarous and bloody arbitration of battle.

"No such power has ever been delivered into the hands of a single body of men before, but those who will hold it have been well tried, and they may be trusted to wield it without pride and without selfishness, the twin curses that have hitherto afflicted the divided nations of the earth, because, with the fate of humanity in their hands, and the wealth of earth at their disposal, it will be impossible to tempt them with bribes, either of riches or power, from the plain course of duty which will lie before them."

As Natas finished speaking he signed with his hand to Tremayne, who rose in his place and briefly addressed the assembly:

"I and those who will share it with me accept alike the power and the responsibility—not of choice but rather because we are convinced that the interests of humanity demand that we should do so. Those interests have too long been the sport of kings and their courtiers, and of those who have seen in selfish profit and aggrandisement the only ends of life worth living for.

"Under the pretences of furthering civilisation and progress and maintaining what they have been pleased to call law and order, they have perpetrated countless crimes of oppression, cruelty, and extortion, and we are determined that this shall have an end.

"Henceforth, so far as we can ensure it, the world shall be ruled not by the selfishness of individuals, or the ambitions of nations, but in accordance with the everlasting and immutable principles of truth and justice, which have hitherto been burlesqued alike by despots on their thrones

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and by political partisans in the senates of so-called democratic countries.

"To-morrow, at mid-day in this place, the chief rulers of Europe will meet us, and our intentions will be further explained. And now before we separate to go about the rest of the business of the day, let us, as is fitting, give due thanks to Him Who has given us the victory."

He ceased speaking, but remained standing; the same instant the organ of the cathedral pealed out the opening notes of the familiar Normanton Chant, and all those at the table, saving Natas, rose to their feet. Then Natasha's voice soared clear and strong above the organ notes, singing the first line of the chant:

"The strain upraise of joy and praise!"

And as she ceased, the swell of the organ rolled out and a mighty chorus of hallelujahs burst by one consent from the lips of the vast congregation, filling the huge cathedral and flowing out from its now wide-open doors until it was caught up and echoed by the thousands who thronged the churchyard and the streets leading into it.

As this died away Radna sang the second line, and so the Psalm of Praise was sung through, as it were, in strophe and anti-strophe, interspersed with the jubilant hallelujahs of the multitude who were celebrating the greatest victory that had ever been won on earth.

That night the inhabitants of the delivered city gave themselves up to such revelry and rejoicing as had never been seen or heard in London since it foundation. The streets and squares blazed with lights and resounded with the songs and cheerings of a people delivered from an impending catastrophe which had bidden fair to overwhelm it in ruin, and bring upon it calamities which would have been felt for generations.

While these events had been in progress three squadrons of air-ships had been speeding to Petersburg, Vienna, and Rome. Three vessels had been dispatched to each city, and the instructions of those in command of the squadrons were to bring the German Emperor, the Emperor of Austria, and the King of Italy to London.

The news of the defeat of the League had preceded them by telegraph, and all three monarchs willingly obeyed the summons which they carried to attend a conference for the ordering of the affairs of Europe.

The German Emperor was at once released from his captivity, although only under a threat of the destruction of the city by the air-ships, for the Grand Duke Vladimir, who ruled at Petersburg as deputy of the Tsar, had at first refused to believe the astounding story of the defeat of his brother and the destruction of his army. The terrible achievements of the air-ships were, however, too well and too certainly known to permit of resistance by force, and so the Kaiser was released, and made his first aerial voyage from Petersburg to London, arriving there at ten o'clock on the evening of the 8th, in the midst of the jubilations of the rejoicing city.

The King of England had sent a despatch to the Emperor of Austria inviting him to the Conference, and General Cosensz had sent a similar one to the King of Italy, and so there had been no difficulty about their coming. At mid-day on the ninth the Conference was opened in St. Paul's, which was the only public building left intact in London capable of containing the vast audience that was present, an audience composed of men of every race and language in Europe.

Natas was absent, and Tremayne occupied his seat in the centre of the table; the other members of the Inner Circle, now composing the Supreme Council of the Federation, were present, with the exception of Natasha, Radna, and Anna Ornovsky, and the other seats at the table were occupied by the monarchs to whom the purposes of the conference had been explained earlier in the day. France was represented in the person of General le Gallifet.

The body of the cathedral was filled to overflowing, with the exception of an open space kept round the table by the Federation guards.

The proceedings commenced with a brief but impressive religious service conducted by the Primate of England, who ended it with a short but earnest appeal delivered from the altar steps to those composing the Conference, calling upon them to conduct their deliberations with justice and moderation, and reminding them of the millions who were waiting in other parts of Europe for the blessings of peace and prosperity which it was now in their power to confer upon them.

As the Archbishop concluded the prayer for the blessing of Heaven upon their deliberations with which he ended his address, Tremayne, after a few moments of silence, rose in his place and, speaking in clear, impressive tones, began as follows:

"Your majesties have been called together to hear the statement of the practical issues of the conflict which has been decided between the armies of the Federation of the Anglo-Saxon peoples and those of the late Franco-Slavonian League.

"Into the motives which led myself and those who have acted with me to take the part which we have done in this tremendous struggle, there is now no need for me to enter. It is rather with results than with motives that we have to deal, and those results may be very briefly stated.

"We have demonstrated on the field of battle that we hold in our hands means of destruction, against which it is absolutely impossible for any army, fortress, or fleet, to compete with the slightest hope of victory; and more than this, we are in command of the largest organised army and fleet now on land or sea. We have been compelled by the necessities of the case to use our powers unsparingly up to a certain point. That we have not used them beyond that point, as we might have done, to enslave the world, is the best proof that I can give of the honesty of our purposes with regard to the future.

"But it must never be forgotten that those powers remain with us, and can be invoked afresh should necessity ever arise. It is not our purpose to enter upon a war of conquest, or upon a series of internal revolutions in the different countries of Europe, the issue of which might be the subversion of all order, and the necessity for universal conquest on our part in order to restore it.

"With two exceptions the internal affairs of all the nations of Europe, saving only Russia, which for the present we shall govern directly, will be left undisturbed. The present tenure of land will be abolished, and the only rights to its possession that will be recognised will be occupation and cultivation. Experience has shown that the holding of land for mere purposes of luxury or speculative profit leads to untold injustices to the general population of a country. The land on which cities and towns are built will henceforth belong to the municipalities, and the rents of the buildings will be paid in lieu of taxation.

"The other exception is even more important than this. We have waged war in order that it may be waged no more, and we are determined that it shall now cease for ever. The people of the various nations have no interest in warfare. It has been nothing but an affliction and a curse to them, and we are convinced that if one generation grows up without drawing the sword, it will never be drawn again as long as men remain upon the earth.

"All existing fortifications will at once be destroyed, standing armies will be disbanded, and all the war-ships in the world, which cannot be used for peaceful purposes, will be sent to the bottom of the deepest part of the ocean.

"For the maintenance of peace and order each nation will support a body of police in which all citizens between the ages of twenty and forty will serve in rotation, and this police will be under the control, first of the Sovereign and Parliament of the country, and ultimately of an International Board, which will sit once a year in each of the

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capitals of Europe in turn, and from whose decision there will be no appeal.

"The possession of weapons of warfare, save by the members of this force, will be forbidden under penalty of death, as we shall pre-suppose that no man can possess such weapons save with intent to kill, and all killing, save execution for murder, will henceforth be treated as murder.

"Declaration of war by one country upon another will be held to be a national crime, and, should such an event ever occur, the forces of the Anglo-Saxon Federation will be at once armed by authority of the Supreme Council, and the guilty nation will be crushed and its territories will be divided amongst its neighbours.

"Such are the broad outlines of the course which we intend to pursue, and all I have now to do is to commend them to your earnest consideration in the name of those over whom you are the constituted rulers."

As the President of the Federation sat down the German Emperor rose and said in a tone which showed that he had heard the speech with but little satisfaction:

"From what we have heard it would seem that the Federation of the Anglo-Saxon peoples considers itself as having conquered the world, and as being, therefore, in a position to dictate terms to all the peoples of the earth. Am I correct in this supposition?"

Tremayne bowed in silence, and he continued:

"But this amounts to the destruction of the liberties of all peoples who are not of the Anglo-Saxon race. It seems impossible to me to believe that free-born men who have won their liberty upon the battle-field will ever consent to submit to a despotism such as this. What if they refuse to do so?"

Tremayne was on his feet in an instant. He turned half round and faced the Kaiser with a frown on his brow and an ominous gleam in his eyes:

"Your Majesty of Germany may call it a despotism if you choose, but remember that it is a despotism of peace and not of war, and that it affects only those who would be peace-breakers and drawers of the sword upon their fellow-creatures.

"I regret that you have made it necessary for me to remind you that we have conquered your conquerors, and that the despotism from which we have delivered the nations of Europe would infallibly have been ten thousand times worse than that which you are pleased to miscall by the name.

"You deplore the loss of the right and the power to draw the sword one upon another. Well, now, take that right back again for the last time! Say here, and now, that you will not acknowledge the supremacy of the Council of the Federation, and take the consequences.

"Our soldiers are still in the field, our aerial fleet is still in the air, and our sea navy is under steam. But, remember, if you appeal to the sword it shall be with you as it was with Alexander Romanoff and the Russian force which invaded England. We have annihilated the army to a man, and exiled the Autocrat for life. Choose now, peace or war, and let those who would choose war with you take their stand beside you, and we will fight another Armageddon."

The pregnant and pitiless words brought the Kaiser to his senses in an instant. He remembered that his army was destroyed, his strongest fortress dismantled, his treasury empty, and the manhood of his country decimated. He turned white to his lips, and sank back into his chair, covered his face with his hands, and sobbed aloud. And so ended the last and only protest made by the spirit of militarism against the new despotism of peace.

One by one the monarchs now rose in their places, bowed to the inevitable, and gave their informal adherence to the new order of things. General le Gallifet came last. When

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he had affixed his signature to the written undertaking of allegiance which they had all signed, he said, speaking in French:

"I was born and bred a soldier, and my life has been passed either in warfare or the study of it. I have now drawn the sword for the last time, save to defend France from invasion. I have seen enough of modern war, or, as I should rather call it, murder by machinery, for such it only is now.

"They spoke truly who prophesied that the solution of the problem of aerial navigation would make war impossible. It has made it impossible, because it has made it too unspeakably horrible for humanity to tolerate.

"In token of the honesty of my belief I ask now that France and Germany shall bury their long blood-feud on their last battlefield, and in the persons of his German Majesty and myself shake hands in the presence of this company as a pledge of national forgiveness and perpetual peace."

As he ceased speaking, he turned and held out his hand to the Kaiser. All eyes were turned on William II. to see how he would receive this appeal. For a moment he hesitated, then his manhood and chivalry conquered his pride and national prejudice, and amidst the cheers of the great assembly, he grasped the outstretched hand of his hereditary enemy, saying in a voice broken by emotion:

"So be it. Since the sword is broken for ever, let us forget that we have been enemies, and remember only that we are neighbours."

This ended the Conference. From St. Paul's those who had composed it went to Buckingham Palace, in the grounds of which the aerial fleet was reposing on the lawns under a strong guard of Federation soldiers. Here they embarked, and were borne swiftly through the air to Windsor Castle, where they dined amicably together as friends and guests of the King of England, and after dinner discussed far on into the night the details of the new European Constitution which was to be drawn up and formally ratified within the next few days.

(To be continued.)

A Manchester man went into a trance the other day, and did not come out of it until the gas-collector went away.

Mrs. Walker: "I don't see why the doctors recommend bicycle riding. If it makes people healthier, it is a loss to the doctors."

Mr. Walker: "I know; but they calculate that one sound, healthy rider will disable at least five pedestrians per week."

Teddy: "I wish I hadn't licked Jimmy Brown this morning."

Mamma: "You see now how wrong it was, don't you, dear?"

Teddy: "Yes, 'cause I didn't know till dinner time that he was going to have a party."

Bildad: "What are you looking so sad about, old man?"

Ichabod: "I'm not feeling well, and I think I'll have to stick to business all the year round."

Bildad: "Why don't you take a holiday?"

Ichabod: "That's just it; I'm not well enough to stand it."

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Send as many coupons as you like.

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The Editor's decision must be final, and competitors must only enter on that understanding.

The Editor reserves the right to close this competition at a day's notice.

Address all envelopes to "War Editor," Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

Pretoria Coupon, S.S. *Feb. 17, 1900.*

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Address.....

.....

Day..... *Hour*.....

(Pretoria Time.)

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The Brain Gymnasium.

On this page, under the title, "The Brain Gymnasium," appear each week a series of puzzles calculated to occupy the attention of the competitors, with interest and profit to themselves, during the long winter evenings. Many of the tasks set will be comparatively easy of solution, while others will be designed with a view to taxing the abilities of the most proficient in this direction.

In these competitions a prize of £2 will be awarded each week to the sender of the greatest number of correct solutions, and to the senders of the ten next highest number of correct ones will be presented either one of our silver-plated pencil cases or a copy of a popular six-shilling novel. Write all your solutions on one sheet of paper, putting the number against each. Post the batch in an envelope marked "Brain Gymnasium," to reach the Editor, Short Stories, 18 Henrietta Street, Covent Garden, W.C., by Monday, February 19th, 1900.

No. 40.

Take an English word, reverse the first syllable, place it after the second, and leave the name of a famous modern painter.

No. 41.

What English word is it, the first two letters of which signify a man, the first three a woman, the first four a great man, and the whole a great woman.

No. 42.

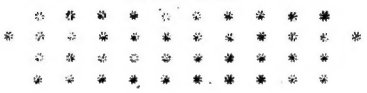
I am a word of ten letters, which is to be divided into two parts. To make my first, you should be my second, and if you are my second, and yet never make my first, you must be my whole.

No. 43.

The centrals of the names of the following, together with a consonant, will, when arranged in their proper order, give the name of a great English poet:

A river in Italy.
A town in Suffolk.
A river in Scotland.
A town in Ceylon.

No. 44.



The longest line of asterisks represents the name by which a well-known English town is known, and the ten vertical rows represent complete words formed with the letters contained in it. The letters used in the whole are as follows:

C C C C I I I I L L L L N N
N O O O O O O O O O O P P P
P P P S S S T T T T T T

No. 45.

A A A A
A A A A
E E E G G L L L
O R S R S S S S

Rearrange the above letters so that two word squares are formed, the connecting word of which is a "thoroughfare."

RESULT OF BRAIN GYMNASIUM.

Nos. 16 to 20.

No. 16.—First Prize. Ten shillings has been awarded to Mr. G. L. Stickels, of 14 Marshall Street, Folkestone.

A copy of "Rev. Annabel Lee," by Robert Buchanan, to W. H. Robinson, Taunton; George Gordon, Kilburn, N.W.; M. van Praagh, Finchley Road, N.W.; George Brown, Possilpark, Glasgow; Miss M. Dingle, St. Margarets, Dublin.

No. 17.—First Prize. Ten shillings has been awarded to John McAra Boyd, of 32 Stevenson Drive, Langside, Glasgow.

A silver plated pencil-case has been sent to each of the following:

C. A. Cramphorn, Leytonstone, N.E.; Miss F. Brett, Old Kent Road, S.E.; G. Beaver, Nunhead, S.E.; Jas. Mitchell, Musselburgh; J. Edwards, Clerkenwell Road, E.C.

No. 18.—First Prize. Ten shillings has been awarded to Jas. Thain, of Longfellow House, 29A Palmerston Road, Bowes Park, N.

A copy of "Lady Jezebel," by Fergus Hume, to:

H. Woodfield, Tirebrook, Liverpool; A. R. Stewart, Edinburgh; Mrs. Ayers, Leytonstone, E.; H. Wellard, Tunbridge Wells; Miss M. Connell, Hertford.

No. 19.—First Prize. Ten shillings has been awarded to M. Kendrick, of Warwick House, Bournemouth.

A silver plated pencil-case to each of the following:

W. P. Gosling, Bournemouth West; Miss G. Thorpe, Eastbourne; A. Keniston, Blandford, Dorset; J. White, Liverpool; F. C. Kettle, Pimlico, S.W.

No. 20.—First Prize. Ten shillings has been awarded to Mr. A. J. Anderson, of 31 Hova Villas, Hove, Sussex.

A copy of "Master Key," by Florence Warden, to:

F. Mannion, Ladbroke Grove, W.; Jas. Matthews, Chiswick, W.; D. Ryan, Dublin; W. F. Broad, Fulham, S.W.; W. C. Lee, Stockport.

SOLUTIONS TO PUZZLES.

January 27th, 1900.

No. 21 Saturn.
Trap.
Elephant.
Prince.
Nile.
Ibex.
Alligator.
Kite.

No. 22. Photograph: Goat, tag, root, o t.

No. 23. "This England never did or never shall lie at the proud foot of a conqueror."—King John, Act 5, Sc. 7.

No. 24. FIRST CATCH YOUR
HARE THEN COOK IT.

No. 25. IN-IT-I-AT-I-ON.

No. 26. Turner. Landseer. Reynolds.

No. 27. "This above all—to thine own self be true,
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man."
Hamlet, Act 1, Sc. 3.

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